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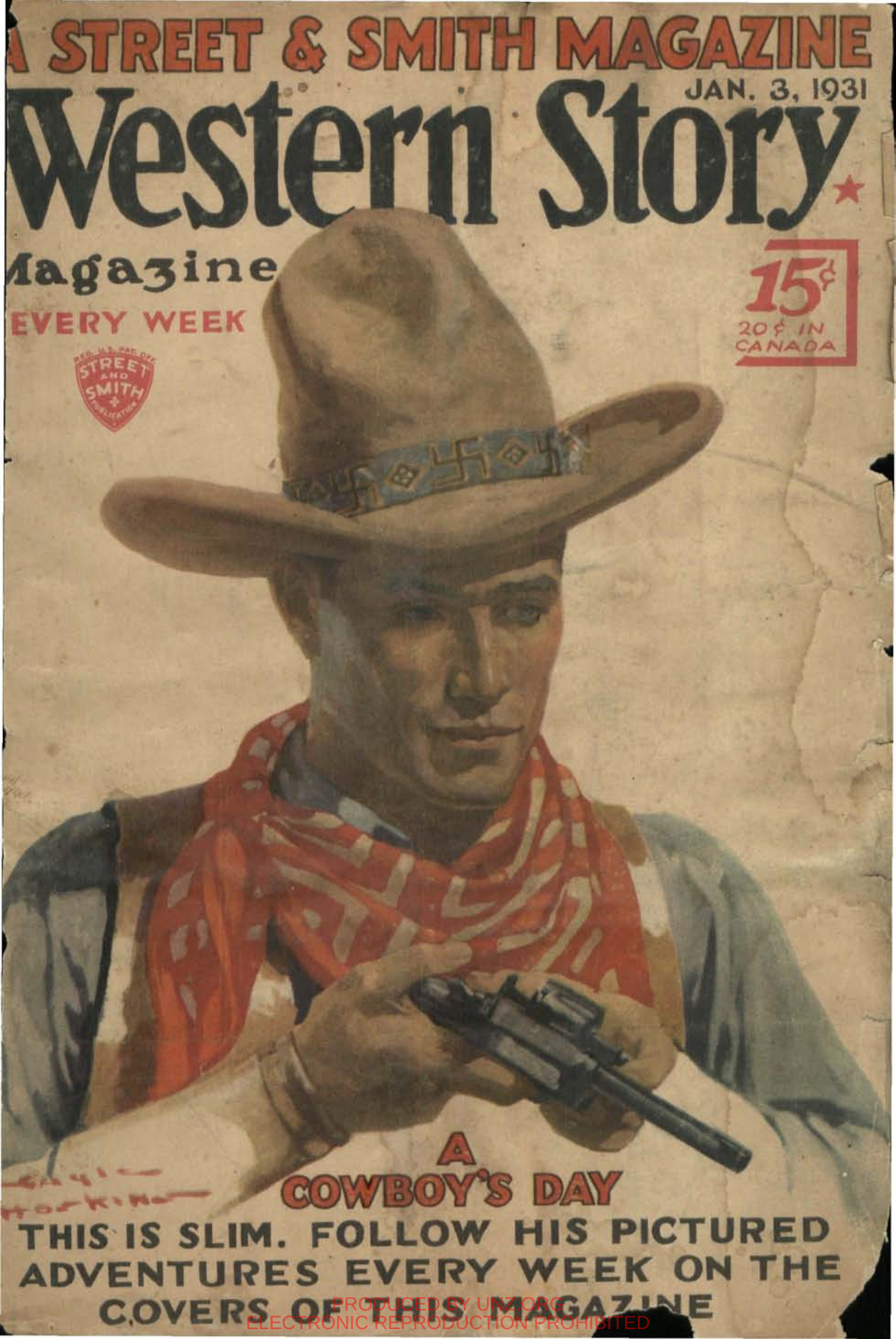

A COWBOY'S DAY

THIS IS SLIM. FOLLOW HIS PICTURED ADVENTURES EVERY WEEK ON THE COVERS OF THIS MAGAZINE

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In Next Week's Issue of Western Story Magazine

CHIP AND THE CACTUS MAN
By Max Brand
If a boy is half a man, then a tiptop boy is as good a man as the best of them. Chip was tiptop.

BLACK SHEEP'S WOOL
By Seth Ranger
How do you like your lamb—cold or roast? With Bud Tuttle it was simply a matter of taste.

BIG TIMBER CUTS IN
By Howard J. Perry
The winning hand doesn't always hold the best cards.

Also Features by

Clem Yore
George Owen Baxter
Roy W. Hinds
And Others

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In This Week's Issue of
DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

HIS CHOICE OF CRIME
By Christopher B. Booth
Forced into a get-away, he meets a dyed-in-the-wool ex-dick who follows his hunch.

CHRISTMAS UNDER COVER
By Charlotte Dockstader
When he needed her most—on Christmas Eve—Luck framed her.

SNEAKY'S CHRISTMAS PEARLS
By Johnston McCulley
Leaving his ill-omened pearls behind him on Christmas Eve, Sneaky strikes out for something new.

Also Features by

Ernest M. Poate
John Foland
Donald Van Riper
And Others

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On the Stands Now

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All morning he works in overheated offices, rushes out into the cold to a restaurant filled with others suffering from colds and sore throat—germs there.

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GOOD READING

By Charles Houston.

Love is so elusive an emotion, so difficult to ensnare, so quick to fly out of almost any window, that to write genuinely of love, to catch in cold print the glowing colors and tangled skeins of this thing called love would seem to be the most difficult of arts.

And yet there are in America a number of writing men and women who can through the alchemy of their genius transfer to paper the true picture of the love of a man for a maid, so that those who read their works experience the thrills and take part in the adventures of the very real characters who walk through the pages of the books.

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(Continued on following page)

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"Who has known heights shall bear forevermore
An incommunicable thing,
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GOOD READING—*Continued*

and little peace they were to know. A whole world, it would seem, sprang to arms against their romance. But because Ursula and Andrew loved one another nothing else mattered, neither poverty nor social ostracism nor the mysterious loss of their beloved child. For Ursula found in the arms of Andrew a sweet ecstasy which swept all barriers away.

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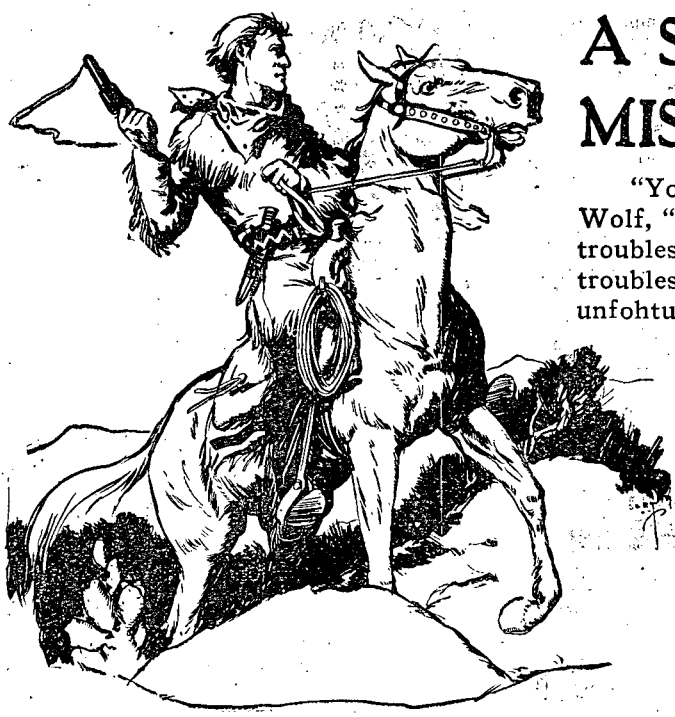

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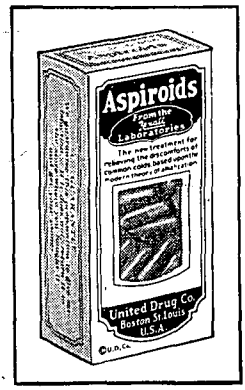

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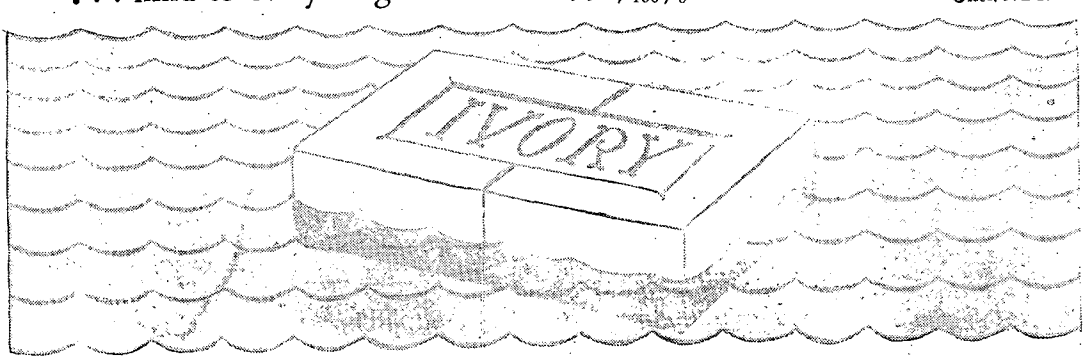

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New Diggings

By George Cory Franklin

Author of "White Christmas," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A GIRL'S PROBLEM.

THE wind whipping around the corner of a building caused one of the three brass balls above the door of a Larimer Street shop to creak mournfully. The sound seemed to awaken a sad-eyed girl who stood before the scarred glass show case to realize that the keen-eyed man in the silk skullcap was making her an offer for a ring he held caressingly between the first finger and the thumb of his right hand.

"How much did you say?" queried the girl.

"Seventy-five is all that I could loan you."

Carol knew that the ring had cost three hundred. Her father had told her so one night as she had sat at his feet listening to the sweet old story of her mother's engagement to him.

"It was my mother's," she stammered. "I promise you that I will redeem it if I have to work my fingers to the bone."

The old man shrugged his shoulders. How many people had stood just where this gray-eyed girl stood now and pleaded the same consecration to a memory. Something in the tone of the girl who was pawning her mother's love token caused him to do what no experienced money-lender should ever do—look up while he was bargaining. He saw the pallor of her face and noted that the outline of her girlish cheeks was broken by lines of worry and want. He made the second great mistake of asking her what she expected to do with the money.

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From out on the street came the cries of excited newsboys:

"All about the big strike on Bear Creek! Ben Holden cleans up ten thousand dollars from a ten days' run! Great gold rush starting! Flour brings a hundred dollars a sack in the new diggings!"

The expression in the eyes of Carol Lance reflected her interest so plainly that a person far less astute in reading the human mind than was Isaac Wolff would have read the answer to his question. He rubbed his hands together with a characteristic gesture.

"You would follow the stampede, yes?"

Carol's face showed a faint tinge of pink. "Not as a stampeder. I can sing and dance. I want the money to buy clothing. I can make a hundred dollars a night in the new camp."

The soul of the devout old man recoiled at the picture the girl's words presented to his mind. He shook his head. "You're not that kind," he cried. His words and manner indicated a fatherly anxiety.

Carol's eyes flashed. "I know Western men, especially the men who brave the dangers of a winter's campaign. I would rather take my chances with them than stay here in a cabaret or work for ten dollars a week in a department store. I cannot buy what clothing I require with less than one hundred and fifty dollars. If you won't let me have that much, give me back the ring."

A gleam of cunning showed in the old man's eyes. "You have worked in Denver?" he asked.

"No, I have never had to work before. My family were all swept away in the Poudre Dam disaster. I have nothing but that ring and my ability to sing and dance." She held out her hand for the ring.

Unconsciously, Isaac's fingers tightened. Never in his life had any one been able to drive a bargain with him as Carol was doing now. Instantly he saw the latent business ability of the girl. He must have time in which to make some inquiries.

"I will loan you one hundred and fifty dollars, and maybe I have something better for you than dancing."

Much to Carol's surprise, he handed the ring back and with it a five-dollar bill. He retained, however, the engraved card that Carol had given him when she had asked for a loan, supposing he would make out some sort of a ticket or receipt for her treasure.

"You go get you something to eat," Wolff directed. "In an hour you come back and I will have a proposition to make to you, or else I will loan you the money on the ring."

The sight of the crisp bill aroused Carol to a realization of how hungry she was. Only when the pangs of a normally healthy youthful appetite had become acute had she reached the decision to pawn the ring. She was too hungry to exercise her usual caution in taking money from a stranger. Besides, Wolff had promised to loan her one hundred and fifty dollars on the ring. This five was merely an advance to her. She did not realize that in giving her the money Wolff had insured her to return to his shop. He had rightly judged that the girl was the soul of honor and would come back, if for no other purpose than to pay him the small sum he had advanced.

No sooner had Carol left his office than Wolff began looking through the directory, holding the card Carol had given him in one hand while he ran his finger down the list of names under L. Here it was, the only one in the directory—"Kenneth Lance, confidential agent of a well-known life insurance company." Wolff was pleased at the information so far gained. He called a number and gave the name and some instructions, with the admonition to get the information quickly.

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Carol did not take time to go to a better part of the city in order to find a place to eat. She hurried to the nearest resturant, one that had been a famous rendezvous during the boom days of Creede and Cripple Creek. Already old-time miners and prospectors were flocking to this place, convinced that here they would find the latest news from Bear Creek.

Carol found a table and gave her order for a substantial meal. Several of the weather-stained, bearded faces were familiar to her. She had often accompanied her father on his trips through the mining camps, and it was her knowledge of these men and the lives they led which had caused her to make the decision she had made. Hardly had she glanced over the heads of the crowd when a florid-faced man took the vacant chair opposite her and pounded vociferously for service. Two waiters collided in their haste to respond.

"Yes, Mr. Holden." One of them bowed obsequiously.

"Holden!" Carol wondered if this red-faced person with the brown blotches on his neck could be the lucky man who had, according to the papers, received ten thousand from his clean-up on Bear Creek. The manner of the waiters would indicate that he was well known as a free spender. Her speculations about the man who sat across the table from her were forgotten as she saw a younger man leaning against the long shelf that had at one time been the most noted bar in Denver.

Possibly her own desperate hunger made her more than ever sensitive to the stunned appearance of dull despair in the eyes of the ragged youth. There was no question but that the smell of food was torture to him. Carol remembered having seen the same expression of ravenous craving for food in the eyes of a dog that had been shut up and forgotten for days. Why did not the boy make known his need to the excited men who milled around him? Miners are notoriously free-handed. This starving boy would instantly have met a generous response to his need.

The waiter brought Carol's order and hurried away. The spirit of compassion which is strong in the young, especially in young girls, swept Carol into an impulsive action. She arose, took three quick steps to the side of the youth, and placed one small brown hand on his ragged coat sleeve.

"Come," she ordered, "your dinner is ready."

The young man looked at her through eyes that apparently saw not, but he followed her obediently, and sitting in the chair Carol had just vacated, he grabbed in both hands the bowl of soup she had ordered and drained it without stopping. The waiter was coming with the rest of Carol's dinner, but she waved him to the next table, which had just been vacated.

"Double my order," she said, "and serve it there."

She again pulled at the ragged sleeve. "We will sit here." She spoke firmly as if she had authority, which, for the moment, she did possess; the same authority that a life-saver has to knock out a drowning man in order to save him—the warrant that a desperate need gives to a clear-headed, merciful person.

As Carol held the young man's arm and helped him to rise, her eyes for an instant met those of the red-faced man across the table from her. Something very like an electric spark flashed between them. Carol felt the flame of color which suddenly surged over her throat and cheeks. She knew, even before she caught the sneer of Holden's lips, that he had misjudged her.

The excitement that the news of his clean-up had caused had made Holden famous in a few hours, and his natural conceit, together with the homage of those who hoped to profit by information that he might give them, had made

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him more than ever conscious of his own importance. He saw in the tableau he had just witnessed an attempt to arouse his admiration by showing sympathy for an apparently starving man who certainly was a good actor—too good, in fact.

The vacant seat at Holden's table was quickly filled by a queer-shaped, wizened-faced little man who kept him busy answering questions about the new camp, the condition of the trail, the length of time before the frost would prevent further placering.

Carol restrained her protégé from the danger of gorging himself by the tactful manner in which she led him to talk about himself. She learned that his name was Donald Tracy, and that he was a lumberjack, that he had been "rolled" of his summer's wages. Even his clothing had been taken and he had that day been discharged from the county hospital in the rags furnished by a charitable organization. He was as helpless in the city as a country dog might have been, and as confused as a city man would have been in the woods that were home to Don.

CHAPTER II.

HOLDEN'S FIRST DEFEAT.

THEY left the restaurant together, Carol's face burning with anger as she again caught the amused expression in Holden's eyes as he sat at the table talking with his strange-looking companion.

Don walked slowly along with Carol, and among the excited stampeders who crowded the sidewalk they were left as much to themselves as if they were alone. Carol stopped in front of the pawnshop.

"I've got to go in here for a while. Sit down on that box there and rest. When I come out we'll know more about what we are going to do next."

Don watched the meaningless confusion in the street. Teams dragging heavy, rattling ore wagons, angry drivers cursing each other; a pack train winding its way through the crush, each mule crowding close to the one in front, fearful that the jam would cause him to lose his place. Don shook his head and muttered:

"If I ever get out of this hole to where I can smell the forest and hear the chirp of a woodchuck again, I'll sell my interest in city life for a white chip."

Carol came out, her eyes were bright. Evidently she had great news that she could hardly wait to tell. She drew Don into a doorway out of the force of the crowd.

"How much do you know about handling a pack outfit?" she demanded.

"That was my work with the lumber company. I had a job packing grub and supplies from one camp to another."

"Do you suppose you will be strong enough to work in two or three days if I get you a room where you can be quiet and have good food?"

Don's back straightened. "Gee, girl, give me another such meal as we just had, and I could load a pack string this afternoon!"

"Come!" Carol actually took Don by the hand and led him along the street to where the stret cars stopped.

Gradually the danger and rush were left behind them as the car made its way out of the turmoil of downtown traffic into a residential section where, after watching the signs in the windows for some time, Carol pushed the electric stop signal. She rented a room for the boy, paid a week in advance, and sat down with him on the little porch in front.

"Now, I'll tell you what I'm going to do," she began. "That old moneylender is going to stake me to a load of supplies to take in to Bear Creek. He has an idea that a girl will be safer than a man because the miners will protect her from the riff-raff that always follow

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a boom, whereas they would think that a man could look out for himself."

Don nodded. "He's more than half right, at that. You would be a lot safer there than here where everybody is out to grab everything in sight."

"Mr. Wolff, the man who is going to back me, knows where there is a string of pack mules for sale," Carol went on. "He has gone to see what he can do. If he gets them, I may want you to go with me to-morrow to look them over. In the meantime, you lie around here and rest. I have made arrangements with the woman who runs this place to see that you get what food you need."

A look of terror came into Don's eyes. "You ain't goin' away, are you?"

Carol laughed merrily. "Don't you worry. I promised Wolff I'd be back in an hour. He's been making some inquiries about me, and he is so sold on what he thinks I can do that he is scared to death I might not accept his proposition. I told him I would see if I could get an experienced packer to work for me, and if I could I would be back to see him."

Don's face showed more courage than at any time since Carol had known him.

"You get me a mule string, and if we can hold 'em together long enough to get out of this town, I'll put your stuff into Bear Creek and guarantee not to lose a pound of it."

"That's the spirit," praised Carol. "Now, you go to your room and lie down until Mrs. Brown calls you to supper. I may be out again to-night, but if not, I'll see you in the morning."

Carol was already running to catch the next car into the city. In half an hour she was again standing before the scarred show case. Wolff was beaming. He had bought the pack train outright and the two saddle horses that went with it. He was busy making out a list of the most salable articles to be shipped to Bear Creek.

"Hello, little partner," he greeted Carol. "Did you find the man you wanted?"

"I did, Mr. Wolff, but I've got to buy him an outfit, as well as myself. I guess I will still have to pawn my ring."

Wolff made a deprecatory movement with his hand. He counted out one hundred and fifty dollars and pushed it across the show case to Carol.

"I will advance you that much. You may keep the ring, or leave it here in the safe, as you please."

"He must have got a great line on me from somebody," Carol thought, "but just the same, I prefer to have him have no hold on me." She insisted on pawning the ring according to the usual custom, a fact that still further built up the money-lender's confidence. She was turning away, her keen mind already intent on the things she must buy for Don as well as herself, when she became conscious of a man standing beside her. Carol was not surprised to recognize Holden and beyond him the wizen-faced man.

"Say, Wolff," cried Holden in a contemptuously superior tone, "you have made a big mistake! Thought you'd hold me up by buyin' that pack train, didn't you?"

The surprise in Wolff's eyes showed that he had not yet grasped the meaning of the angry miner's words. Unconsciously he shot an inquiring glance toward Carol. Holden turned and for the first time recognized the girl as the one who had sat near him in the restaurant.

"Oh, it was you, was it? You spying little sneak! You overheard me tell Monk that I was going to buy those mules, and you ran down here and thought you'd work me for a few dollars, eh?"

Carol's anger flared. "You are certainly crazy," she snapped back at him, "I don't know what you are talking about."

"That's a lie!" came Holden's insult-

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ing sneer. "How else could this old robber have——"

Smack! Holden learned that an angry girl will take her own part as quickly as any other impulsive young animal. His cheek smarted under the unexpected slap.

"You little wild cat," he threatened, "I'll break you in two for that!" He made a grab for Carol, who dodged under his arm, ran quickly across the storeroom to a rack of guns and grabbed one, then turned about to face him.

The girl's familiarity with the store and her quick selection of a weapon caused the angry man to hesitate. He had no way of knowing that Carol had never seen that particular rifle before. It was not likely that guns on sale as these were would be loaded, but the bluff—if it was a bluff—had been perfectly executed, and the gray eyes of the girl were almost black as she stood with the rifle ready to defend herself.

Wolff ran around the corner of the show case, gesticulating excitedly and yelling:

"Police! Police!"

A bulky blue-uniformed figure stood in the doorway. "What's comin' off here?" The officer recognized Holden from the pictures that had been running in the papers telling of the strike on Bear Creek. He jumped to the conclusion that an attempt was being made to hold up the miner.

Holden instantly sensed his advantage. "This girl here overheard me talking with Monk"—he motioned toward the wizen-faced man—"in a restaurant. We was figuring on buying the only string of mules there is left that ain't been hired for the trail. She rushed down here and got this fellow to go and buy them so's they could hold me up for twice what they are worth. It's always the way these alley rats do with an honest man," he finished virtuously.

The officer was not at all averse to gaining favor with a man who every one predicted would soon be a millionaire. He stepped forward, taking Carol by the arm. "You come along with me." He started to drag the girl toward the door.

Instead of giving way to the sudden misfortune that had befallen her, Carol gave Patrolman McCarty the surprise of his flat-footed career.

"If you want to get yourself into deep trouble," she admonished, "turn in a call." She held up the pawn ticket Wolff had just given her. "I was standing there pawning my mother's wedding ring when this man insulted me. I slapped him and ran to the gun rack." Carol threw down the lever on the rifle. "If he had been anything but a four-flusher who has had a streak of luck he'd have known that a gun standing here would have been empty. It happens that I know half a dozen men down at City Hall, among them the chief of police. Call up Desk Sergeant Soward and ask him if he knows Carol Lance."

The attitude of Patrolman McCarty changed suddenly. He struggled to get out of the affair without loss of dignity. He let go of Carol's arm and shook a warning finger at Wolff.

"Dont let any more rows start in here, and next time don't call police unless you want somebody arrested."

Holden and Monk followed the officer out into the street. Wolff stood wringing his hands despairingly.

"Oh, oh," he mourned, "such bad luck! You have made an enemy of the most powerful man on Bear Creek. Maybe we better not go on with our plan."

"Bosh!" retorted Carol. "We're not going to give up just because we had a little run-in with a man like Holden. I'm glad it happened here instead of on the trail some place, or after I got our store started. You go on with your list for the first load. I've got a lot of things to buy this afternoon."

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Wolff, however, had not Carol's optimism or youthful enthusiasm, and he shook his head doubtfully as he went about his work.

"It's a bad start," he muttered, "making an enemy first thing, and, worst of all, of the only man w[illegible] has ever made a clean-up in the new [illegible]mp."

Don Tracy waited all afternoon for Carol to come back. The more he thought about the girl and her quick sympathy for him, the more anxious he was for her to return. Don's life spent in the far places had prevented him from knowing many women, and none like Carol. He had read of such girls during the long winter's evenings when he had hibernated in some far away cabin. He leaned back in the easy chair the kind-hearted landlady had brought out onto the little porch. His mind wandered to pictures of well-loved places in the forest and from that into a dream of a sun-drenched forest with Carol Lance as the central figure of his dream.

A week later the dream came true. Don had finished unsaddling the pack string and stood for a moment watching the mules as they rolled contentedly. The smell of frying bacon and bubbling coffee mingled with the sweet odors of the forest. He turned, to see Carol dressed in a khaki suit, beyond her the dark green of the forest and red of purpling leaves. A joy such as he had never experienced before came to the forester. He tingled with the thrill of quickened vitality. He felt his old-time strength returning to him, and a happiness he had never hoped to find again shed a soft glow over the scene.

"Come and get it, Don," Carol's voice echoed happily. "Twenty miles since breakfast and it won't hurt you to eat all you want to now."

No one would have recognized the brown-faced man who sat cross-legged at the edge of the canvas table Carol had spread on the grass as the starveling she had rescued in the restaurant. His brown eyes twinkled humorously as he joked Carol about her biscuits, to which he was paying the compliment of devouring his fifth.

"The forest is glorious in the fall," Carol countered. "What a crime it would have been to have let Holden bluff us out of such a chance as this."

Don's face lost its humorous expression and his eyes their twinkle.

"Holden is on the trail one day behind us," he explained. "That light-loaded outfit that passed us this morning camped with him night before last, they told me."

"What of it? This is a free country." Carol shook a warning finger at Don. "Would you be worrying about Holden if you were alone—that is, if you had a man with you instead of me?"

Don colored at the ease with which his fears had been read by Carol.

"I'm not afraid of him as it is, only I——"

"Only what?"

"Well, I don't want to have to hurt Holden."

"I hurt him twice," laughed the girl. "I left the prints of my fingers on his face, and I hurt him still more when I showed him that I had bluffed him with an empty gun."

"He's a stubborn sort of a man, and he has a lot of power up here. Money counts, even in a mining camp."

Carol stood up, her brown hands on her hips, around which circled a well-filled gun belt.

"Look here, Don Tracy, get your mind up out of the sand. This isn't Russia or little Georgia. My father was a pioneer. My mother fought Indians. I feel more at home here in the forest than I ever felt in a city, and you are a forester. Tell me why you are so afraid of Holden."

Don fidgeted nervously.

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"Come on," insisted Carol, "out with it."

"I'm not afraid for you when I'm around," he explained. "It's when I've gone back for another load. Holden won't fight me, now that I'm well and strong; that is, not in the open."

"Well, snap out of it! I didn't take the job with the idea of having to have a guard watch me, and your job is to pack the stuff in to Bear Creek as fast as I can sell it. Once I get a cabin built and begin to get acquainted with the miners, I'm not afraid of Holden any way he wants to play the game."

CHAPTER III.

BEAR CREEK.

IN charge of Don Tracy, Carol's pack train wound its way through the narrow lane which formed the first street of Bear Town. Don was watching for a suitable location for the cabin, which must be quickly thrown together to house Carol's goods. The girl rode up beside him.

"Over there, Don, near that little creek is the best place."

"I had my eyes on that cliff. We can dig back in the bank for a cellar," Don answered, turning his horse toward the spot.

As yet there was no semblance of system to be seen. The one street simply followed the law of general convenience to the tents already set up. Carol lost no time. She found two men who had worked it over the trail in the hope of finding work enough to earn a grubstake. These she put to work in the timber back of where Don was unloading her stores. In a few minutes she was back helping Don put up the long tent which must do for a storeroom while the cabin was being built.

Don turned his mules loose and worked till dark fashioning a rude counter for Carol and making a bedstead for the little tent at the rear. At dark, the two men Carol had hired came in for supper. They were miners who had lost their summer's wages and were anxious to get a foothold in the new diggings.

Joe Dalton, the larger of the two, was a man of fifty-five years. He had a pleasant, honest face and showed the proper spirit by helping about the camp. The other man, who gave his name as Travis, Don did not like. He had shifting eyes that seemed to be constantly attempting to see something that was not intended for him to see. After supper the two went down among the tents.

New arrivals were pouring in. By the light of bonfires and lanterns the crazy shacks were being thrown together. Some men had already gone out to the diggings along Bear Creek and were panning the gravel. One came back showing a small nugget.

"She's here, boys!" he shouted. "Coarse gold and lots of it, the best I've seen since the stampede to Ophir five years ago!"

Yells of joy greeted the announcement.

Don turned back into the tent. "I can't leave you here alone," he began.

Carol's entire attitude had changed. It was as if she, too, had caught the fever of gold.

"Don't be silly," she told him. "You must start back in the morning. Joe Dalton is all right. I will tell him to find a man to help him, and I will let Travis go as quick as I can. I've got a lot to do to-night, letters to write, lists to make out, orders for Wolff to fill. You go down and look around. Perhaps you may see Dalton."

Don walked down into the village. He met men whom he had known in the lumber camps. There was little drinking as yet. Except for the excitement, there was no disorder. Don was standing in front of a newly opened saloon, talking with an acquaintance, when he

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saw Holden's train pull in. Men crowded around the lucky miner, asking questions. There was no doubt but that he was the man with the most power of any here. He roared orders to his packers to unpack over by his tent, and strode past Don into the saloon.

In a moment the tent was packed with a surging mob of excited men. Some one howled above the din that Nels Petersen had found a nugget. Holden scoffed:

"One nugget! Why, there's millions along this creek! The bars haven't even been scratched for ten miles up and down the main Bear. Little Bear will yield heavy. I've panned gold on Goose Creek and both the Pole Creeks. She's goin' to be a hummer, and we're here first. Come, boys, the drinks are on me."

Don turned away. He met Dalton. "How long will you work for Miss Lance?" he asked.

Dalton hesitated. "I was figurin' on only long enough to get a grubstake. Why?"

"I've got to go back to the end of the wagon road on the Rio Grande in the morning," Don replied. "It will take me ten days to double the trail there and back. I hate to see Miss Lance left alone in this mob. When the men come to know her she'll be safe, that is, unless——"

"Unless what?" Dalton asked.

Lines of white showed about Don's mouth. "Unless Holden takes a notion to annoy her."

For a moment Dalton looked through the open door at the wild scene in the saloon. "I see what you mean," he answered. "I'll stick by her until you get back."

Don looked around. The crowd was milling away from where he and Joe Dalton stood. He leaned closer to Dalton. "I don't trust Travis, and neither does Miss Lance. See if you can find another partner to-night."

Dalton nodded and wormed his way through the crowd toward where Holden stood against the bar. The man who stood close to Holden was "Monk," and he was talking to Travis. Holden noticed Dalton and sized him up expertly.

"Hello, old sourdough," he greeted. "Lookin' for a grubstake?"

Dalton shook his head. "Not just yet," he answered. "I want to look around a few days first."

"Well, when you want to dig in, come to me. I'll help you to get a start," Holden proffered.

Don knew that had this offer been made to Dalton, even half an hour before, the old prospector would have jumped at it.

Travis instantly showed his selfish disposition. He pushed forward in front of Dalton.

"Does that offer go for anybody else?" he asked.

Holden would not have chosen Travis as a partner, but he could hardly withdraw his proposition now without losing the reputation as a plunger and liberal spender which he was building up.

"Sure, I'll grubstake you. Are you and him together?" Holden motioned toward Dalton.

Travis sneered. "Naw, we just been workin' to-day helpin' that girl get camp fixed. I'm not crazy about women."

"Women? A girl?" questioned Holden. "I didn't know there was any of 'em had got in here yet, but they'll come fast enough." His eyes took on a different expression. "I met one in Denver this trip." He brought a red, hairy hand down on the bar with such force as to make the glasses jump. "By the eternal, I wish she'd drift in here! I'd like a chance to get even with her for interfering with my plans."

Don did not wait to hear the conclusion of the bargain between Holden and Travis. He hurried back to the tent,

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where he found Carol with a pile of letters stacked before her.

"I can't go back and leave you here alone," he began.

Carol picked up an envelope and withdrew a sheet of paper. "When you reach the railroad, send this telegram to Wolff first thing," she directed. "There will be another load of merchandise there for you to bring back. This boom is going to be bigger than any one supposed it was. You are going to be a busy man."

"But, Carol, Holden is just waiting for a chance to make trouble. He——"

"Will get a dose of lead poison if he bothers me," Carol interrupted. "I'm here to make an honest living. I know this sort of life, and I'm not afraid of Holden or a dozen like him. You will start at daylight."

Don's heart was heavy as he trailed south over the barren mesa next morning, but Carol gave little thought to him or his fears.

Dalton had hired a Norwegian by the name of Talbot to help him and the two were busy in the forest behind the tent store. The cheerful ring of the two axes was like music to Carol. She worked like a beaver arranging her goods, stopping frequently to wait on a customer. By noon the best-worn trail in the village led to Carol's store, and the tin box in which she kept her cash was filling rapidly. If trade kept up like this her shelves would be cleared before Don could possibly get back. So far, Carol's was the only store in the camp. She had seen no other women. Any woman having less of the pioneer spirit than she possessed would have trembled at the prospect of living here alone, but she had no sense of fear or loneliness.

Wolff had promised to send an older woman to help Carol, and if he had succeeded in getting one who was willing to brave the terrors of a forest winter, she might now be waiting at the railroad. Anyway, Carol gave the matter of companionship little thought. She was succeeding in her venture, and the fact that she was making a huge profit for herself and Wolff gave her courage to meet any obstacle.

In three days Dalton and Talbot had the walls of the main storeroom up. Over this they spread the larger tent for a roof and turned to the work of building a living room at the rear of the store. During her few idle moments Carol worked at moving into the new building. Occasionally one of her customers helped her to carry in heavy boxes or sacks.

Six days after he had said good-by Don's string of mules came slouching down the mountain, groaning and grunting under heavy loads. With him came Olga Johnston, a strong Swede girl whom Wolff had hired.

The future looked bright to Carol. Business was good, several rich strikes had been made, more people were arriving every day. With Olga to help her, she felt equal to any emergency. That night she worked till past midnight on an order for winter supplies. Don aided her. His experience was valuable. At last, Carol laid down her papers, after footing up her order.

"If Wolff don't weaken on buying that order," she told Don, "you will be a busy boy till after Christmas."

Don smiled. He had been much relieved to learn that so far Holden had ignored Carol's presence. The men who came to the store joked familiarly with the girl and went away, evidently well satisfied with the treatment they were receiving, in spite of the high prices they were paying.

"After the snow comes, my work will be easier," replied Don. "Once I get a snow trail broke so that I can pull toboggans I'll bring in three times as much every trip as I'm bringing now."

"At the rate people are coming in

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here," Carol prophesied, "we'll be pushed to keep up our stock of goods, and next spring will see the biggest mining excitement since Creede."

Don left next morning feeling much safer about Carol. Dalton had decided to make no attempt to open up the claims that he and Talbot had located until spring. Already, Don saw a romance budding between Olga and Talbot. He hoped this would prosper, as it would add much to Carol's safety to have the protection of a married woman. He whistled merrily to the mules as he wound up out of the valley and looked down upon the little town that had sprung up so quickly.

Carol stood in the doorway of the store to wave encouragement to him as he made the last switchback at the top of the slope. It was a glorious fall morning. Lazy woodchucks basked in the sunlight, yellow-hammers screamed joyously in the forest. Far up on the mountainside Carol saw a buck, glorious in his fall coat of blue, leading a band of does and fawns down through the red and gold of the aspens. She turned to go back into the store.

Three men were coming up the now well-worn path from the town. Carol recognized Holden, and with him were Monk and her former employee, Travis. For an instant the girl's heart missed a beat or two. She was alone. None of the others had yet appeared. Olga was in the room at the rear of the store. Carol went behind the counter. She had planned this moment many times, but never had she expected that Holden would make his first visit so early.

She took a six-gun from the drawer where she kept her money and laid it on a small shelf beneath the counter, pulled an account book so that it lay directly above the gun, and began adding up figures. The high point in the brave girl's adventure was advancing with each crunching footfall on the path outside the cabin.

CHAPTER IV.

HOLDEN'S SURPRISE.

NOW, Carol heard the men stamp into the room. Purposely she bent low over her book.

"Well, well," boomed Holden, "quite a store, and run by a pretty woman, too!"

He had turned his back for a moment and was examining the well-filled shelves on the other side of the room.

Carol saw that he had not recognized her, and for a moment a panic seized her. Never had she been so tempted to run as she was at this moment. A wild suggestion to dodge into the back room and send Olga to wait on the customers came to her. With an effort she steadied herself, and taking a deep breath, she spoke in a steady, even voice.

"My stock is not complete yet, but I hope to have another mule-train load in soon."

Holden whirled at the sound of Carol's voice. There was no question about his complete surprise. A flood of angry red surged into his face. He took two long steps and stood with only the width of the counter between him and the girl.

"You——" In his surprise and rage Holden could not think of words. The muscles of his face worked angrily.

Monk and Travis gazed with astonishment at the tableau.

Carol's right hand grasped the handle of the six-gun as it lay on the shelf The feel of the weapon gave her courage.

"I am Miss Lance," she remarked. "Perhaps you mistook me for some one else."

The coolness of the girl in thus offering him an opportunity to regain control of himself caused Holden to hesitate, and as the anger receded from his brain, to think more rationally.

The side door creaked and Dalton walked in. He held a Winchester in one hand.

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"There's a big buck up on the hill," he marked casually to Carol. "Some venison would go good."

Carol's relief showed in her greeting to Dalton.

"I'm glad you came in, Joe," she replied easily. "I wish you would open those boxes of canned goods."

Holden glanced at Dalton. He was confident that the old miner's entrance had not been accidental. He decided on a complete change of front. He would accept the opportunity Carol's quick wit had given him and play an entirely different game.

"We want to buy a bill of goods," he began. "I'm staking these two men for the winter," he explained, motioning to Monk and Travis. "You can let them have anything they want. I'll pay for it." He turned as if to go out.

Carol had no intention of losing the slightest shadow of the advantage she had gained.

"Our business is cash," she said. "I cannot fill an order on any other basis."

The girl could not have made to the self-important Holden a more cutting speech than this. Nothing is more humiliating to a man with newly acquired power than to be forced to defend it. Holden liked to be pointed out as a rich man. The fawning of men like Travis and Monk was like the breath of life to him.

"My name is Holden," he said. "Does that mean anything to you?"

"Not a thing," answered Carol. "The richest man in the world couldn't buy a box of matches in this store without paying for it."

The smiles on the faces of the three men were like salt in the freshly opened wound of Holden's lacerated pride. He tossed a roll of bills on the counter.

"I guess that will pay for what they want." From his manner one would have thought this was all the money in the world.

Carol counted the money. "There is only five hundred dollars here," she said sweetly. "That will not go very far toward buying a winter's grub supply."

Holden dared not trust himself to talk further with the girl who had defeated him at every turn.

"When that's gone I'll get some more," he snorted, and left the room.

Carol placed the money in her tin box. She failed to see the significant glances that passed between Monk and Travis and the avaricious expressions on their faces. Flushed with her victory over her enemy, she turned to wait on the men. They purchased slowly, stalling for time, waiting for Dalton to go on with his hunting. Whatever plans they had formed, however, were defeated by the entrance of Olga, and a few minutes later Talbot came in. Customers crowded into the store. Monk and Travis completed their purchases and went out, but not until they had carefully noted the doors and windows in the building and the position of the tin box.

During a lull in the trading that afternoon, Holden returned. He saw that Carol was alone. He strode to the counter.

"I guess I've made a mistake," he began. "You are not the kind of a girl I took you for."

Carol did not help him out. She stood with her right hand on the shelf below the counter.

Holden fidgeted nervously. "I can be a big help to you here," he said.

"I'm doing pretty well without any man's help," Carol answered. "You sized me up as a blackmailer. What has caused you to change your mind?"

Holden's attitude was entirely different. "You can't blame me for making a mistake," he fended. "All the women I ever saw in that part of town were gold diggers."

"Wonderfully smart you are," scoffed Carol. "Did you think I was trying to work Don?"

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Holden looked up quickly. "Who is Don?" he asked.

"The boy I saved from starving and divided my dinner with in the restaurant that day when your self-consciousness made you imagine everybody was thinking of you just because you had your picture in the paper."

Holden winced. It was strange the power that this slip of a girl possessed to hurt him. Unconsciously he was striving for her good opinion. He was not enough of a psychologist to know that the very fact that she despised him and took no pains to hide her feeling caused him to desire her admiration more than that of any other person. A wholly new emotion stirred within him. He gazed with awe upon the girl, less than twenty years old, whose courage had braved the dangers of a gold stampede, wrested success from a venture that the old money lender had feared to trust to a man, and who now stood defying him, unquestionably the one man in Bear Creek who might protect her and her property.

"There's no use for us to quarrel," he remarked sullenly. "What became of that boy—Don, you called him?"

"He left here this morning. He is pulling a pack train for me."

"You don't mean that packer is the same boy that was with you in the restaurant?"

"I certainly do. I never could have got through but for his knowledge of the country. A few good meals and a little kindness did wonders for him."

Holden wanted to tell her that perhaps a little kindness might make a man of him, too, but the blazing eyes and up-tilted chin of the self-reliant girl prevented him. More than all the gold on Bear Creek he wanted to humble her, to make her eyes quail before his own. Physical danger would not accomplish it, that he knew. He wondered if she were in love with Don. If she were——

He leaned toward Carol.

"When will Don be back?" he asked, apparently to make her talk.

"He was gone a week last trip. If he has good luck he ought to make it a day earlier this time. His stock knows the trail and are getting hardened to the work."

Like a panorama the trail from the end of the tracks to Bear Town unwound before the mind's eye of the man who questioned Carol. The dangerous possibilities of the trail were quickly appraised. If for any reason Carol's line of communication with the outside world were to be destroyed, the girl's venture would be like a rudderless boat adrift on the ocean. Only by keeping a regular supply of merchandise coming into the camp could she hope to hold the trade of the miners.

Holden saw his opportunity. He got up and went to the door, looking up toward the pass. Clouds had gathered there since morning. The wind was soft and damp. In case of a storm, it would be easy for one or two men to hold up the train, force Don to unload, and go back to the railroad. Carol need never know what had happened to Don, or why he had failed her.

Holden looked back at Carol. She was watching him intently. Again that peculiar spark flashed between them. Carol felt it and shivered as though with the cold. Holden hardly understood his own feelings. Something within him urged him to go back and tell Carol that he wanted to be her friend, that he would help protect her; but his stubborn pride and the memory of how she had flaunted him prevented such an action, and he turned and hurried down to the saloon where he knew he would find Monk and Travis.

Next morning Carol awoke in a world of strange silence. Her watch said eight o'clock, but there was barely sufficient light for her to tell the time of day. The usual noise of the mining

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camp was lacking. Not even the calls of the winter birds were to be heard. She sprang from her bed and pulled aside the shade. Outside the snow fell in an opaque mass.

Silently, like the uninterrupted flow of a mighty stream, the snow swept down, piling up on the branches of the spruce a foot deep in a single night. Except for the anxiety for the mule train Carol would have rejoiced in the sense of comfort which surrounds one who is safely housed and supplied with food when winter clamps down its first hold on the wilderness.

She called Olga, and dressing herself in the boy's clothing she had provided, she went to the cabin of the men and called Dalton and Talbot. Breakfast was a merry meal in spite of the storm. No customers appeared and the three did full justice to Olga's cooking. Dalton got up from the table, saying that he and Talbot would go back to an aspen grove and finish cutting a supply of firewood, to be packed when Don returned with the mules.

Carol swept the store, and was surprised to see fresh tracks where some one had come up from the village, stood on the narrow walk before the store, and then gone away. The tracks had been made during the hour since daylight. She wondered why a customer had not pounded on the door. Usually the miners were not so considerate.

A sudden fear surged into Carol's heart. She walked hesitatingly back to her own room. Her legs seemed incapable of supporting her body. She lifted the little suitcase where she nightly hid her wealth, to her an enormous sum. The tin box was gone. For a minute she lay stunned by this unexpected blow. As reason returned she knew that the thief had entered while she and her men were at breakfast. She remembered having unlocked the front door when she went to call Dalton and Talbot.

For several minutes she struggled with almost overpowering hysteria and attempted to put down her fears that she might cope with this disaster. Her first thought was of failure, then of danger to herself. What proof had she of having been robbed? How could she square herself with Wolff? Scalding tears surged into her eyes at the thought of the injustice of it all, of how she had worked and braved untold dangers in an effort to make an honest living, only to have her success swept away by a sneaking thief.

Strangely enough, her thoughts turned to Holden as the only man who might help her. She ran back into the store, buckled on her belt, and looked at the well-filled cylinder of her gun. She swung a light pair of web snowshoes over her shoulder and ran down toward the silent street.

No smoke rose over any of the cabins. The miners were sleeping off last night's celebration over the latest strike. The tracks she was following led down past the saloon, across the porch, straight to Holden's cabin.

Carol's heart almost stopped beating at this discovery. Holden, the very man she was going to ask to help her! It couldn't be that he was a thief. Why should he, a man whose claim was worth hundreds of thousands, stoop to steal her poor earnings?

Timidly she knocked on the door of Holden's cabin. There was no reply. She lifted the latch and peered within. Articles of clothing scattered about showed that some one had prepared for a trip without thought of where he threw the lighter garments he discarded.

Carol came out again into the street. A broad trail of web snowshoes led out of the village and up toward the pass. "He's going to the outside," Carol breathed. "There's only one hope for me. I've got to catch him, and I can do it. He's got to break through soft snow, while I will have a packed trail." She ran back into Holden's cabin and

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made up a bundle of food from the open packages that stood on the table. Five minutes later her snowshoes clicked determinedly as she climbed the slope above Bear Town.

CHAPTER V.

THE SNOW TRAIL.

THE snow in the Bear Creek Valley was now eighteen inches deep. It was light, feathery, and increased in depth as Carol climbed the slope. She turned for one last look at the scene of her venture. The little village might have been one of the "ghost towns" of pioneer days. No smoke curled over the chimneys. Except for the trail she followed, not a mark marred the surface of the snow. A great sense of loneliness and depression seized her and her breath caught in a spasmodic sob as she turned to face the unknown dangers of the pass.

Carol well knew that if the wind were to come up a few minutes would suffice to obliterate the trail made by Holden's snowshoes. She was familiar enough with winter travel above timber line to know that she must provide against such a danger. Twice during happier years she had crossed the Continental Divide with her father, and she had seen him mark a snow trail. She stopped at the first thicket of willows, and with the heavy sheath knife at her belt, cut a bunch of willow sticks which she swung over her shoulder. Then she pressed on through the last fringe of spruce and out into the unbroken waste of white above timber line.

The air was as still as the unruffled mirror of a protected pond. Ptarmigan crowed happily from the protection of near-by rocks. On such days, these birds are in their element, the life they love. From the crest of the ridge above a fox barked. The sound seemed to harmonize with the wild scene and gave Carol a strange sense of power. She felt strong, exhilarated, primitive. She thought of herself as one with the pioneer women who had braved such dangers and in whose honor the bronze monument in the civic center in Denver had been raised.

The trail became merely a wide ditch, the snow filling rapidly. Carol stuck a willow firmly in the snow, packing it in with her hands, and went on. Fifty feet farther she placed another one, and so on across the top of the divide and down to the timber on the other side. With a sigh of relief she stood for a moment in the protection of a timber-line spruce. At least, she had crossed the most dangerous part of her trip. The trail from here on to the railroad would be downhill all the way. The tracks were plainer here; and for the first time Carol noticed that there was more than one track, and she saw the smooth imprint where a toboggan had been dragged.

That there might be more than one of the robbers had not occurred to the girl. She made good time now. Turning a corner she came upon a scene of brutality that frightened her more than all the dangers she had experienced that day. In a little park three men were fighting like savages. She caught a glimpse of Holden's flaming red hair as he staggered from a blow on the head which the queer-shaped Monk had dealt him with a heavy club. Holden caught the arm of his former partner in one of his mighty hands and twisted it until Monk screamed with pain.

Travis rushed in, brandishing a heavy knife, which Holden dodged, so that he received only a glancing blow. He landed a terrific wallop to Travis's jaw, which sent the latter sprawling. The snow under Holden's feet turned crimson, but he fought on, meeting the attacks of the two men as the leader of a wolf pack might have met the treachery of his band. Again and again he caught one of his assailants in his hands

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and hurled him down the mountain. Had the ground been bare, such falls must have quickly decided the fight in favor of Holden, but Travis and Monk rolled in the soft snow, only to come back cursing, snarling, fighting, with all the savagery of wild beasts.

Carol lost all consciousness of herself as she watched the struggle, forgot her own possible interest in the outcome, and gradually, as she saw the physical courage of Holden as he derided his enemies, even as he stood bruised and battered from their wounds, a great admiration for him came to her. For the first time she remembered her gun and realized that she held the balance of power in this unequal combat. She saw Holden go down under a treacherous blow from Monk's club and lie still. Travis was coming up the hill, knife in hand. In a moment he would plunge the weapon into Holden's unconscious body.

Carol stepped forward, gun in hand. "Stop!" Her voice rang out crisp and commanding. "If you strike him again, I will kill you both."

Monk and Travis had no desire to face a gun held as was this one. They sprang behind tree trunks, and grabbing up their snowshoes, went jumping and dodging down the mountainside.

Carol knelt by the unconscious form of her enemy, ran her hand over his skull, and decided that there was no fracture. Boldly she cut the shirt away from the wounded man's shoulder and examined the slash made by Travis's knife.

"He's knocked out, but not necessarily killed," she decided. "I can't leave him here to die from exposure."

Carol saw the overturned toboggan lying where it had caught against a scrubby tree. She went to it, and untying the ropes which held the load in place, she secured the canvas cover, which she spread over Holden. She saw that the toboggan had carried a complete camp outfit, blankets for two beds, grub for the trip to the railroad, a sharp ax and a short-handled shovel.

A wild hope that she might find the tiny money box hidden among the packages on the toboggan surged into Carol's mind, but she was disappointed. Probably Holden had the contents of the box hidden about his clothing. Perhaps he and the two men had quarreled over it. At any rate, no matter which one of the three had taken the money, the others must have known of the theft. The friendship of the three was recognized by all the villagers.

The sound of the wind moaning through the tops of the trees warned Carol that she had no time to waste in speculations about her stolen money. She looked at her watch. It was three o'clock. There would be barely two hours of daylight left. Well she knew that her life depended upon her reaching some protected spot in the forest before night.

The heavily loaded toboggan carried all she needed with which to make herself as comfortable as she would have been back at the store. The wounded man alone became her problem. What should she do with Holden? Human pity prevented her from leaving him here to die. She pulled back the edge of the canvas; somehow, the man's face did not appear nearly so hateful now. There was a fearful bruise over his right temple. Carol moistened her handkerchief in the snow and tenderly wiped the wound, leaving the tiny cloth to protect the jagged cut.

Holden stirred and opened his eyes. They reminded Carol of the innocent eyes of a little boy. No matter how much cause she had to hate him she could not leave the man here to be covered by the drifting snow, to be buried alive. Carol shuddered at the terror of such a death. Holden sighed gently and closed his eyes, as if too tired to keep them open.

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Carol reached a sudden decision. She spread one of the blankets on the snow below Holden and rolled him onto it, placing the canvas over him. Then she quickly repacked the toboggan and followed the trail made by Monk and Travis down into the heavy forest. The tracks of the two men showed that they feared the terrors of a night unprotected from the storm which was increasing in fury. They had sped down the trail with long strides. Carol felt secure from any further attack.

She found the place for which she searched at the edge of a windfall near the trail. A log fallen and lodged securely between two green trees provided a base for her camp. She shoveled the snow from a space underneath the log, piled the camp outfit there, and hurried back up the mountain, dragging the light toboggan easily. By five o'clock Carol had transported Holden to her camp, spread the canvas over the log and weighted the ends down with snow, cut a quantity of green boughs and placed half the blankets on them. Here Holden slept comfortably while Carol dried her clothing before a fire which roared up in defiance of the snow.

A hot meal which she had cooked while her clothing dried put new heart into the girl, and when at last she rolled snugly in warm blankets while the blizzard shrieked among the peaks above timber line, she had no thought of the strangeness and unconventionality of her position, but only gratitude that she had temporary protection from the blizzard which had broken along the ridge above her.

CHAPTER VI.

HOLED UP.

NEXT morning Carol awoke to find the snow had completely covered her camp, and but for the ventilation just below the log over which she had spread the canvas, she must have smothered while she slept.

Holden was conscious, but very weak from exposure and loss of blood. His eyes followed the movements of the girl hungrily as she shoveled the snow away from the camp and rebuilt the fire. The curiosity evidenced by the question in his eyes forced him to speak.

"Why did you start out in a storm?" he asked her.

Carol leaned on her shovel and looked at Holden in astonishment.

"I'd think that by this time you would know I would not just sit down and weep because my money was taken," she retorted.

For a moment the eyes of the man widened with surprise. Then an expression of understanding overshadowed all else. He seemed to be thinking deeply, striving to piece together the fragments of knowledge he had of Carol's affairs. A faint tinge of a sneer showed at the corners of his mouth.

"Travis came to Bear Creek with you, didn't he?"

Carol shook her head. "No, I never saw him until I hired him to cut house logs. He worked for me only one day. I don't think you can slough the responsibility for this robbery off onto Travis," she said. "My money was stolen, and I followed the tracks of the thief to your cabin."

In spite of his weakness, Holden's face flamed angrily. "You're goin' to stick to that lie, are you?"

That Holden would attempt to imply that she was in collusion with Travis for the purpose of blackmailing him had never occurred to the girl until now. Never in all her life had she felt such a sense of injustice or realized how stubbornly a man would stick to an obsession. Holden had made up his mind the day in the restaurant that Carol had designs on his money. He was still reasoning from that basis and believing that even now, in spite of the girl's kindness to him, she was attempting to blackmail him.

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Carol stood for a full minute looking squarely into Holden's angry face.

"If I served you as your self-importance so richly deserves, I would leave you here to die," she said. "You will never have sense enough to accept any other motive on my part but the one your conceit has placed upon my actions, but I will make you give me back my money, and some day perhaps you will know how you are misjudging me."

A gleam of proud spirit flashed into the eyes of the wounded man. His lips parted as if he were about to speak, then with a despairing gesture he leaned back against the pillow Carol had provided for him.

Carol prepared breakfast, which they ate in silence. The wind had ceased during the night, but the snow still fell in almost an opaque mass. The trees had become solid cones of snow. After breakfast, Carol boiled water in the tiny camp kettle and washed and dressed Holden's wounds. Again she noticed that same boyish expression in the eyes of the man, and it unnerved her so that her fingers trembled as she worked. It was impossible to hate a man with the eyes of a child, even if he were your enemy.

"There," she said, giving the bandage a little pat, "does that feel better?"

Suddenly, Holden laid his hand over Carol's. "You have been wonderful, have saved my life. In spite of our quarrel, I love you."

For a moment the world about Carol swayed dizzily. She was angry at her lack of self-control. She jerked her hand away hastily and turned to pick up her ax.

"I am going back into the forest after wood," she told Holden. "If you feel like getting up it will be better for you to stir around a little."

She saw a snowshoe rabbit near a bush and killed it with a shot from her six-shooter. When she returned to camp she found that Holden had managed to gather a small pile of firewood, using his one good arm. The smell of tobacco greeted Carol's nostrils. Never had an odor seemed to harmonize with her mood as did the scent of the pipe. She drew down the rabbit proudly.

"We eat," she announced. "There are dozens of them within a hundred yards of camp. I can easily kill all we need."

Holden nodded surlily. He was evidently annoyed at the coldness with which Carol had rebuffed his advance. He had had time in which to think of how she had come alone to Bear Creek with Don. Again the manhood which had been momentarily stirred into activity was sunk beneath a flood of jealous suspicion. He failed to notice that Carol was gentler now, that she watched him questioningly, and that there was a look in her eyes that, had he known enough to interpret, might have changed his entire experience. As it was, Holden lost the precious opportunity when one tender word might have won for him happiness.

Carol sighed, and taking her knife from its sheath, dressed her game and set it to cook on coals drawn out from the fire. She busied herself for a long time and finally sat down at the opposite side of the camp from Holden. For the first time in the twenty-four hours since she had discovered that her money had been stolen, Carol had an opportunity to think calmly and to apply her really fine mind to her problem.

She began to reason by induction. She saw that her proof of Holden's connection with the affair was purely circumstantial. The tracks she had followed in the loose snow and which led to Holden's cabin might have been made by any man. There might have been some reason for Holden making a trip to the outside, and the encounter with Monk and Travis which she had witnessed might have been over some quarrel of which she knew nothing. Again

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she wondered at the man's motive for stealing her money, if he had stolen it.

From where she sat Carol could for the first time study Holden's face unobserved. The dim light that filtered through the storm-gripped forest showed her the outlines of squarely rugged features, a slightly prognathic jaw, a high forehead below a heavy growth of red hair. It was a face from which a sculptor might have taken a model for primitive man—impulsive, strong, seeing only the ultimate goal, and riding roughshod over intervening obstacles. That he was fearless she had seen in the manner with which he fought barehanded against two men.

In spite of herself Carol could not hold anger against the man whose life she had saved. She sat studying him and suddenly saw his face assume an interested, youthful expression. Carol wondered what he had seen that caused the change, and looking in the direction in which Holden was gazing, she noticed a camp bird, the whisky-jack of the woods dwellers, perched on a snow-laden bough looking at the man inquiringly. She saw then that Holden was tempting the bird with a piece of bacon rind, holding it at arm's length. The camp bird flew close to the coveted morsel. While the bird was in the air Holden craftily moved his hand so that it had to hop closer in order to peek at the rind.

Carol forgot all else in watching the game between the bird and the man for more than half an hour. Holden worked patiently to overcome the little creature's fear, until at last the whisky-jack confidently perched on his left hand while it permitted him to stroke its head gently with the fingers of the right. All the time the bird picked energetically at the food.

Surely a man who could win the confidence of a wild thing must have a heart. Why could not Holden have judged her more charitably? Carol tried to put herself in the man's position and to reason as he must have done, but it was impossible. Her experience was not sufficient.

For four days the two remained at this camp, held aloof from each other by an impenetrable wall of misunderstanding. Twice each day Carol washed the wound in Holden's shoulder. The storm broke the second day and the mercury dropped to twenty below. During the few hours of sunlight Carol snowshoed over the well-packed drifts to kill rabbits for food. The man and the girl exchanged only such words as were necessary. Neither made any attempt at conversation. The morning of the fifth day dawned much warmer. Holden declared himself able to snowshoe back to Bear Town.

"Then I will go with you as far as the top of the divide," Carol replied. "I didn't nurse you back to life to have you overexert yourself and reopen that wound."

Holden's face showed his bewilderment. "What do you mean?" he demanded. "You can't stay here."

Tears flooded Carol's eyes. "I have got to go on to the railroad and from there to Denver. In some way I must convince the man who backed me that I was robbed. Whether he will believe me or not, I do not know."

A great change came over the soul of Holden. Carol's simple statement had carried conviction to him. In that moment he saw the girl as Don had seen her—honest, brave, unselfish beyond his wildest dreams of a woman's character.

"Carol," he began, "we have both been fools. I didn't take your money. I don't know who did, but that makes no difference. Come back to Bear Town with me and I will give you the money to pay Wolff."

He leaned toward her, his eyes burning with eagerness.

Carol no longer saw him as rough or repulsive. The boyish expression she

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had come to look for in his eyes, and his gentleness with the wild things of the forest, overshadowed all other thoughts of him. His voice now was strong, manly, vibrant with a love he struggled to control. For a moment Carol's natural caution fought against her loneliness, and in that instant the sound of men's voices came to them. Carol turned to look down the mountain. Don was coming with the mule train. Two men carrying shovels rode with him.

"Don! Don!" There was no mistaking the joy and relief in the girl's voice.

Her frank gladness seemed to take Holden's heart in an icy grip. For an instant he watched Carol bounding down the mountain. Then he began picking up their camp outfit. Again the joy that had been almost within his grasp had eluded him.

Carol's first question to the packer was of Monk and Travis. She now believed Holden's declaration that he had had no part in the robbery, and she was convinced that the two men who had attacked him were the guilty ones.

Don had not seen either of them, and he was sure that they had not reached the railroad.

"Most likely they struck some trapper's camp and holed up there," he told her. "Wolff answered your telegram right away," he continued, drawing out a yellow slip. "He is shipping all the stuff you ordered and the toboggans I asked him to send. I'll have to divide the train and find some man I can trust to handle half the mules."

Carol motioned toward the camp. "Holden tried to help me," she explained unblushingly. "He fought Monk and Travis. He was badly wounded."

Don's face was a study. "Holden helped you!" he gasped.

"Yes, he overtook those men, fought with them single-handed, but they got away. They got away. They stole my money!"

Don got off his horse and extended his hand frankly to Holden. "I sure am glad," he told the miner. "She's goin' to need all the friends she's got."

Holden made no reply, but depressed as he was at what he thought he saw in the frank camaraderie between Carol and Don, yet he felt a sweet sense of solace in making what reparation he could for the harm he had intended to do Carol in employing Monk and Travis to stop the mule train and force Don to turn back to the railroad. He had told Carol nothing of what he had had in mind, nor of his attempt to humble her.

His fight with the two men had started when they, for some reason which Holden now began to suspect had something to do with the missing money, refused to go on to meet the pack train. They had attacked him when they thought he was not expecting it, and but for Carol's protection their plan must have succeeded. He spoke to Don:

"I overheard what you told Carol about splitting up your train and getting another man. I know an experienced snow fighter that I can get to help you."

Don was much relieved and made room on the packs for the camp outfit. Holden rode one of the extra horses, and Carol was made comfortable on the toboggan which was pulled by a gentle horse. Holden had no opportunity to speak to her again on the trip back to Bear Town, and when Don left for the railroad again next morning Holden accompanied him.

Years of living alone on the raw edge of civilization had made Holden self-reliant, capable. He went now at the work of restitution with the same energy and patience that had enabled him to succeed as a miner. He had a fair idea of the amount of money that

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had been stolen from Carol, and he had cashed one of the checks she had given for labor on a Denver bank. He would deposit the amount she had lost to her credit in that bank and instruct the cashier to notify her. Holden was rich. His claim was far better than any other that he knew. When Don and Carol married he would give them a fine home, do all that they would let him do for them. Never again would he misjudge people as he had these two.

On the way out Don formed an entirely new estimate of Holden. In spite of his left arm being stiff from the wound he had received, Holden kept up his part of the camp work and the saddling of the stock. The merchandise had arrived, and with it the toboggan Don had ordered.

"Now, if I had the man you spoke about," he told Holden, "I'd be rollin' out to-morrow pullin' double the load the mules could pack."

Holden smiled. "I'm the man I was talking about. Will I do?"

"You?" Don's face showed his astonishment.

"Uh, huh, if you think I can hold down the job."

"You? You mean you're goin' to turn mule-skinner and help me keep this snow trail open?"

Holden nodded.

"Well, I don't know what I've done to deserve such luck," Don rejoiced, "but sure I'm not askin' any questions. With you helpin' me, we'll put this freight into Bear Town like it was feathers."

On through the cold and snow of a hard winter Holden and Don fought the rigors and problems of the snow trail together. Their faces became like saddle leather, and their bodies, hardened by the long hours of muscle-torturing labor, lost every ounce of superfluous flesh and were panther-lithe. Their muscles attained the strength and flexibility of wire cable, and as they toiled day after day together a bond of friendship sprang up between them that nothing, even the love of a girl, could sever. Their teamwork was perfect; they came to rely upon each other till they worked as if controlled by one mind.

With the first warm days of spring, their problems increased. Soft spots in the snow trapped the feet of even the wisest of the mules. Day travel was discontinued, and the sleighing was done at night.

The spring rush was sweeping upon them. Carol's store was now well stocked, and she concluded to order no more goods until the snow had disappeared and the trail dried out.

Men were bringing their families into the camp. There was talk of a wagon road being built from the outside. The water began to gurgle under the snow. The ice went out with a rush, and brown spots showed on the hillside. The snow trail over which Holden and Don had fought their weary way was now a brown welt two feet above the surrounding mass.

Don turned the mules loose to a well-earned rest below the snow line on Bear Creek and located a claim on a branch where Holden had panned gold. Holden did not go near Carol's home or the store. He had only seen the girl at such times as he was helping Don unload supplies. At times his suffering amounted to physical pain as he saw the growing familiarity between Don and Carol, but so complete had the change been in Holden that he gained a strange sense of happiness in the joy he saw awaiting the man he had come to love.

Holden hired men and began operations on his claim. The snow settled rapidly. The robins, the first of the migratory birds to venture north, chirped from the stumps of trees cut during the winter. Long wedges of geese winged their way north. Snowshoe rabbits that had been spotlessly

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white during the winter hid among the budding willows as if ashamed of their dirty, ragged coats mottled with brown.

One evening as Holden came up from the trench he saw a dark object which the heat of the sun had exposed as the snow on the north side of his cabin melted. He examined it and saw that it was metal. He attempted to kick the snow away, but found it was too solid. Procuring a shovel, he dug around it and lifted out Carol's tin money box. He saw it all now. Either Travis or Monk had stolen the box the morning he had taken them out on the snow trail. That was why they had attacked him, in order that they might come back to Bear Town and secure the money they had carefully hid in the snow by the cabin.

Holden took the box under his arm and turned up the path to the store. Carol was alone. He laid the box on the counter.

"At last," he said, "I have proof that I did not steal your money. I found this where Travis or Monk hid it."

Holden did not understand why Carol did not rejoice with him. He had expected that she would cry out with delight and hasten to unlock the box. Instead, she stood looking down. Her slender form seemed to droop pathetically.

"I knew you didn't steal it," she said.

"You didn't believe——" Holden gasped.

"I never really believed that you took it, and when I saw the expression in your eyes the day you were hurt I knew you didn't."

Holden trembled at the sound of Carol's voice. "What did you think you saw there?" he asked.

The long months of loneliness that the girl had suffered had swept all foolish pride from her soul, even as Holden's had been purified. She raised her eyes to his.

"You might have known long ago if you had asked," she said. "I knew that you loved me."

Holden's hands gripped the edge of the counter. "But—Don—I thought that——"

Carol shook her head. "Don is a good, dear friend, but he never thought of me as any more than that."

"And you—you mean that you really will——"

"Of course I will, silly."

From out in the forest came the cheery calls of newly arrived campers. A robin called happily to his mate in a treetop near the store. The sweet scent of the forest, stronger now than at any other time of the year, came to Holden and Carol.

Spring had come to Bear Town.

MAX BRAND, at his best in a thrilling Novel, "CHIP AND THE CACTUS MAN," in Next Week's Issue.

PRAIRIE DOGS FIGHT RATTLESNAKES

ALTHOUGH it is a generally accepted opinion that prairie dogs, rattlesnakes, and a certain species of owls live in harmony in prairie dog towns, it has recently been proved untrue in the vicinity of Pavillion, Wyoming.

It is true, however, that rattlesnakes do try to live in rodent villages and often crawl into the underground tunnels much to the displeasure of the prairie dog. In this particular instance a large rattler was driven out of a rodent hole by three very excited prairie dogs. The snake was getting the worst of the deal and would have undoubtedly died in the struggle had it not been for a bystander who settled the matter by shooting the rattler with a revolver.

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Forest Service Preferred

By Allan Martin

Author of "Between Two Fires," etc.

BACK from his monthly day off, Kirk McKinnon rode up Vaile Canyon on the first leg of his five-mile climb to the lookout tower high on the shoulder of Sawtooth Peak. At the first stream crossing, the roan splashed into deep water and sank her muzzle into the cool liquid. As Kirk relaxed in the saddle he heard hoofbeats in the gravel of the canyon bottom. A big bay horse rounded a turn in the trail. The rider, a brawny, thick-shouldered man, wore the bronze badge of the forest service on his flannel shirt. This was Kirk's boss, "Tiny" Weston, the six-foot, two-hundred-pound ranger in charge of the Sawtooth district. His blue eyes lighted as Kirk hailed. Quickly he ranged the bay alongside the road. He cast a swift glance around, then leaned over the saddle toward Kirk.

"Thought I'd meet you about here." Weston's voice was guarded. "Had to see you. Something I didn't want to discuss over the phone. I suppose you've got all the planes tagged that pass over the back country?"

"Ought to know them all by this time, Tiny," agreed Kirk. A gleam of interest flashed into his gray eyes. He waited for Weston to go on.

"I want you to be on the alert for a strange plane that ought to pass over near Sawtooth about sundown," continued Weston. "It's a metal mono, with red circles under the wings. Soon as you identify it, ring me at the Venango station." Kirk nodded, his face puzzled. "I'm telling you in confidence it's from the Lone Condor Mine," explained the ranger, "that Orde and Yager property over toward the desert."

"The outfit that had the run-in with bandits near Oro?" asked Kirk quickly.

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"Yeah. They were jumped when they were packing the gold out to the railroad, but fought their way through. This time they're working it different. They plan to start a dummy shipment by pack mules an hour before the plane leaves. That's to fool whoever it is that's watching operations. Then the plane will land, take the gold aboard, and scoot for the city. I got this direct from George Orde last week—George is a good friend of mine. He and Yager have arranged for an armed car to meet the plane at the landing field in the city, to rush the bullion to the bank vaults." Weston hesitated, then went on, "The rest of my talk is more personal, Kirk." He began fumbling in one saddle bag. Kirk stared as the ranger drew out an envelope and handed over a small snapshot. He shifted in the saddle, turning the picture to the light.

It showed four men posed against a corrugated-iron building. As Kirk frowned down at it, Weston leaned close, forefinger passing over the group.

"I got this from George Orde up at the mine," he explained. "That's the office in the background. The stocky fellow is Orde. The thin one with the specs is the bookkeeper. That's Orde's partner, Yager, with the black beard. But here's the one I wanted to show you —the man on the end. Doesn't he look familiar?"

Kirk followed the pointing finger, then with a suppressed exclamation scanned the picture closely. Eagerness lighted his eyes. He saw a tall, rangy man, dressed in faded khaki and high boots, his figure suggesting the lithe spareness of Kirk himself. Around the man's slim hips was a cartridge belt with full loops. A holstered six-gun was tied down to his leg. His face was shaded by a wide-brimmed hat. Kirk looked up, bewildered.

"Sure looks like Sandy!" he said incredulously. Weston nodded agreement.

"Sure looked like him to me, Kirk. It's been five years since your brother pulled out, but this fellow certainly reminded me of him. He says his name is Smith, and he's acting as a guard up at the mine. George Orde says he's a dead shot. But he couldn't tell me much about him; seems that Smith never talks much. But George is pretty shrewd, Kirk. He told me he'd tested Smith out twenty different ways. Feels sure he's square as they make 'em." Weston frowned thoughtfully. "I wonder if it could be——"

"Can't be sure from this picture," pointed out Kirk. "Wish I could see this fellow——"

"I ought to have shown you this sooner." Weston's tone was regretful. "I could have arranged it so you could have seen him on your day off. You see, he's traveling on the plane with that bullion. You could have looked him over at the landing field." Weston smiled.

"But we'll arrange it before long. Keep the picture, Kirk. I got to be hitting for the ranger station. When you ring me about the plane, just say, 'Gone by O. K.' I'll know what you mean. Adios!"

He reined the big bay out of the stream and clattered off down the trail. Kirk rode slowly up the canyon. He let the roan pick her own way, his thoughts mulling over the picture. Could it be—but what would "Sandy" be doing up there, under an assumed name?

His thoughts flashed back to a night five years ago. Then he and Sandy had been living at their father's homestead up Goat Canyon, the canyon that had got its name from lanky "Baldy" McKinnon's herd of Angoras. The homestead was abandoned now, Baldy and the boys' stepmother having cleared out for Oregon, after Sandy left home. Sometimes from the lookout station Kirk had picked out the little clearing with his binoculars, half hoping that he

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would see Sandy coming back. What a terrible fight that had been between Sandy and Baldy! Kirk's eyes narrowed as he saw again that rough and tumble in the old shack, heard again the pounding of feet, hissing, indrawn breaths as blows were struck, the tumbling and thrashing of bodies when they closed. His mouth twisted bitterly. And all because of a cunning and persistent campaign on the part of Baldy's new wife, that flighty widow from the coast, to poison his mind against the boys. Baldy's weight and strength had finally won that fight, but only after a terrible struggle. Kirk remembered the look in his brother's eyes when he had crept into the room they slept in, whispered that he was pulling out. He had gone that night—and Kirk had never heard from him since. And all because—Kirk's lips tightened as he remembered what the stepmother had accused Sandy of doing. Stealing! There wasn't a word of truth in it—that was something Sandy never would have done. Kirk jerked up his head, coming out of his musing abruptly. He had reached the red, forest-service tool box in the upper canyon. And some one was coming down the switchbacks.

Kirk gazed up at the trail. The rider was rounding the last turn, his black mount picking her footing carefully. Kirk stiffened. The burly rider was "Blackie" Miller, who had a nominal patrol job for the water company in Vaile Canyon, and made a little from his bees. And Kirk had heard something in Serrano, just before he left the little mountain village on his ride up to Sawtooth, that made this meeting very opportune. His eyes grew cold and hard. He swung down from the saddle, waiting. As the rider trotted up, he held up his hand.

"I want a word or two with you, Blackie," he said quietly.

Blackie Miller grinned in a sneering way that exposed his blackened teeth. His face was covered with a black stubble of beard, and strands of coarse jet hair stuck through holes in his battered slouch hat. Slyness struggled with defiance in his eyes as he dismounted, watching Kirk warily. Kirk stepped close to him, hands hanging loosely at his thighs.

"Blackie," he said coldly, "I hear you've been talking down in Serrano, spreading it around that Sandy ran away from home because Baldy was fed up with his stealing. Saying that he and ma cleared out because they were ashamed about it. And making the crack that Starr put me on lookout because he couldn't trust me on a patrol job, meeting people, and riding through camps——"

"Aw, you got it all wrong," blustered Blackie, though a surprised guilt flickered in his eyes. "I did say somethin' about——"

"I didn't get it wrong," cut in Kirk coldly. "I got it from some one that wouldn't lie to me. Didn't think I'd hear about this, eh? You——"

"You young cub!" exploded Miller. He lunged forward, swinging. Kirk ducked under the punch, and one of his long arms drove a hard fist at the black-grained jaw. Miller staggered back, then with a roar charged. Kirk lashed out with both hands, cutting the truculent mouth, and starting a red trickle down the stubbly chin. Then Miller was upon him, and his great weight was bearing him back. They crashed down, Kirk underneath. With a snarl of triumph Blackie darted clawing fingers toward Kirk's eyes. By a sideward heave of his body and a quick flirt of his head Kirk barely escaped. Anger surged through him at Miller's tactics, and he brought up a stiff knee. It sank into Miller's stomach. Then Kirk was clear, scrambling to his feet, just in time to meet another furious rush. But this time his fist smacked home under one little piglike eye. Miller's head snapped

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back. At the same moment Kirk whipped up a short, lifting punch, the power of shoulders and back and legs merging into the blow. It caught Blackie flush on the jaw, lifting him, dropping him. He rolled over, collapsed. Kirk waited, eyes narrowed, till Blackie groaned, and started to rise. Then he spoke softly, emphasizing his warning with a rigid forefinger:

"You keep your mouth shut about Sandy! Understand? Sandy wasn't mean—that was just a pack of lies ma told Baldy. Just tend to your water company work and your beehives, and I'll run the lookout station. Do you understand?"

Ignoring Miller's mumbled curses, he swung up into the saddle and started up the grade. Once he looked back and saw Blackie standing by his mount, a motionless figure watching him. There was a hint of something sinister in that still regard. Kirk's eyes flickered with contempt. He rode on. An hour of steady winding upward brought him to the shoulder of Sawtooth and the lookout tower. Kirk climbed the steep flight of steps to the porch running around the glassed-in room, and exchanged a few bantering remarks with Sanford, the relief man. A few minutes later Sanford was riding away along the ridge, and Kirk settled himself in the lookout chair.

His thoughts went to Sandy. Strange if that were Sandy up at the mine—only twenty-five miles from his old home! Then why hadn't he looked up his brother? Certainly there had always been a strong bond between them, stronger after Baldy brought his new wife home, and installed her at the little homestead. That had sure changed things. Sandy had got tighter-lipped every day. Kirk had managed to get away much of the time. He had hung around the ranger stations. Asked a million questions, noticed everything that had to do with the work, ridden tirelessly on patrols. Kind of grown up in the forest service, been adopted by the boys. He'd proved to them that he knew every hogback, spur, and canyon in the back country. Ought to know the reserve—he'd grown up in it. Finally, when he'd got his growth, Starr had given him this post on Sawtooth. Going to take the ranger examination in the fall and——

With a start, Kirk snapped out of his musing. Out of the welter of canyons and ridges his distance-trained eyes had caught a flicker of movement on the old Buckhorn Flat Trail. He snatched up a pair of binoculars from the table before him and focused them swiftly. The lenses showed a horseman herding a string of riderless animals. Seemed to be a furtive quickness in the man's movements, as if he were very anxious to get over that two-hundred-yard open stretch, and gain cover where the trail dipped over a ridge. Queer any one should be using that old trail! It had been practically abandoned since the shorter, easier trail had been cut through from Short Cut Canyon. Hadn't been cleared for a year, must be overgrown with young chaparral—difficult going. These lightninglike thoughts caused a stir of uneasiness.

"I'll just take a slant at you," muttered Kirk aloud.

He put the binoculars down, caught up and leveled a heavy, two-foot telescope. Hard to handle, but it sure brought out the details. As he focused it, the distant rider swam into clearer view. Hurriedly, Kirk appraised him. Wasn't wearing chaps, so he likely wasn't a puncher from one of the desert range ranches. Not one of the patrolmen—Kirk felt sure of that. He knew them all by sight, besides, no one was scheduled to be riding Buckhorn to-day. Big fellow, almost as big as Weston. Looked as if he were packing a carbine in a saddle boot. Kirk shifted his gaze to the driven animals. One was a sad-

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dled horse. Two were big pack mules. Kirk stared.

There were no packs on them! No loads—just the wooden pack saddles! As Kirk grasped this odd fact the distant cavalcade disappeared. He scowled after them, puzzled. If the stranger was going out for supplies he wouldn't be heading for Buckhorn. And if he was traveling the back country he'd naturally be packing grub and an outfit. Why the extra mount? For that matter, why would the rider be going to Buckhorn? Nothing up there. The flat had been partially fire-swept last summer. No one would want to camp on the south end, among all those charred columns of yellow and Coulter pine, or among those weird, blackened clumps, like clawing hands, where the manzanita and buckhorn had been burned over. And although there was a small sun-burned clearing at the north end of the flat, it was exposed to hot winds off the Mojave Desert. And only one spring—a mere trickle in one of the gullies.

Kirk decided to tell Weston of the rider. He called the Venango Canyon station, but the big ranger had just ridden away on business to one of the resort camps. Later in the afternoon Kirk got him by phone.

"Guess it's all right," Weston decided. "I'll get Sanford to ride Buckhorn tomorrow."

The afternoon waned rapidly. The sun began to slide down into the bank of mist that shrouded the distant coast. Nearly time for that plane. Kirk stepped out on the porch to take a humidity reading, and suddenly stood motionless, listening intently. It had sounded like muffled hoofbeats. He looked along the trail he had followed from Vaile Canyon, then at the one that dipped toward the Venango. Nothing stirred. Might have been on the trail running up out of Goat Canyon—that wasn't visible from the tower. He strained his ears. Silence seemed to brood over Sawtooth.

Then, faintly, he caught the distant drone of a plane. Kirk ran inside, jumped up to the platform chair, and picked up the telescope. Without leveling it, he searched the sky toward the desert. There it was—soaring over the distant ranges. The *whir* of the plane grew louder. Monoplane all right, decided Kirk, watching closely. He leveled the big glass, held it on the steadily nearing plane. At last he spotted the faint circles under the wings. He reached out a hand for the phone—and stopped. The plane swerved. A new note crept into the hum of the motor—it missed, caught, missed again. Kirk sat tense. Something wrong! The plane seemed to wabble, then began circling lower, motor silent. It began heading in a long, slanting glide for Buckhorn Flat. Kirk followed it closely, a tight feeling in his stomach. Pilot would have to hit that little flat, or crack up in one of the canyons. Would he make it? Looked like he might hit that rocky gorge to the east. And Sandy—— The guard that he felt was Sandy was on the plane! Kirk's lips tightened. He gripped the edge of the table, followed numbly that swift descent. Down —down—— Then he drew a deep breath, and relaxed. The plane had swung over, merged with the flat.

Excitedly, Kirk seized the phone, rang the ranger station. He heard Weston's answering hello.

"Just spotted it, Tiny!" cried Kirk. "They're forced down . . . something wrong with the engine. Just . . ."

He dropped the receiver, whirled from the phone, startled. The door had swung open—Kirk sprang up, overturning the chair with a crash. He leaped from the platform, to meet the rush of two men across the floor. He had no more than an impression of booted, rough-clad figures, of black-masked faces, eyes glittering through slits——

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Then they were upon him. A blackjack was descending in a swift arc. Kirk slipped the blow with a quick flirt of his head. It crunched down upon his shoulder with sickening force. Kirk swung for the man's jaw. But the fellow was coming in fast, head lowered; the blow glanced off a cheek bone. The man staggered. Swiftly, Kirk sprang aside, just avoiding a vicious swing from his other assailant. He ducked, and dived for the man's legs in a flying tackle. They crashed to the floor. Instantly, Kirk shifted position, realizing in a dazed flash that the figure seemed familiar. That black-stubbled jaw below the mask! Miller! He reached for the man's throat. Then something crashed down upon his head. Suddenly myriads of golden bubbles streamed past his eyes—he was dropping—blackness engulfed him.

He became conscious of bumping, movement up and down. A hammer beat in his head. He lay slack, without moving, without opening his eyes. He could feel that he had been slung across a saddle. His hands were lashed to his feet by ropes tightened under a horse's belly. Brush raked him. Some one was leading the horse, another rider was following. He felt the coolness of a night breeze. Then a familiar voice—Miller's—grumbled from up ahead:

"Lucky we stopped the brat's mouth. I told you, Pete, we oughta started sooner. Kid was just going to say where he saw the plane." The man called Pete grumbled, and Miller went on: "Well, he's outa the picture, and Sawtooth's the only lookout that can make out the flat. Red'd skinned us alive if we'd bungled the job. We'll chuck the kid in his pap's old place." He laughed harshly. "Time he's found, the boys will have the gold to the car and——"

"Shut up!" snarled the rider following Kirk. "Want him to hear, you fool?"

"Aw, he's dead to the world, all right," growled Miller, and then subsided.

They plodded on in a tight silence. Kirk lay inert, hoping to learn something further. But neither man seemed inclined to talk. Kirk gave a low cry, as if regaining consciousness, and began twisting and straining against his bonds. The bandit riding behind him crowded his horse alongside, and jabbed a warning gun muzzle into Kirk's side. He took the hint, lay still. They turned off the main trail and began treading a narrow way cut through the brush. Kirk recognized the route—it ended at Baldy McKinnon's clearing in Goat canyon. Branches whipped back and grazed his head, tore at his legs. Then they emerged into a mountain clearing, plodded by shriveled corn rows.

Outside Baldy's weather-beaten shake house they halted. The rider swung down. Kirk was untied, dragged from the saddle to the ground. They bound his ankles together, lashed his wrists behind him. He was packed through the doorway, across creaking, disused boards, and dumped down like a sack of meal in a corner. One of the men grunted, and planted a heavy kick in his side. Kirk gritted his teeth, quivering at the blow, but remained silent. That would be Miller! Probably have killed him if the other fellow, Pete, had stood for it. His captors tramped out. He heard the sounds of a stick being wedged in the hasp of the door. Hoofbeats faded as the two rode away. Sounded as if they were riding down the canyon. That way would bring them out to the Tarp Canyon road.

A hot rage surged through Kirk. He rolled over, nearer to the wall. After a number of trials he managed to struggle to a sitting position. He wrenched savagely at the cords binding his wrists behind him, but the only result was to cut them into his flesh. He stopped, panting. For a few moments he sat

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motionless, forcing his throbbing head to deal with the situation coolly.

Miller and a stranger, both masked, had attacked him savagely, evidently to prevent his reporting the plane's landing on Buckhorn. But why? It flashed through Kirk's mind that they had expected the descent on the flat. Then the trouble with the plane had been a ruse, part of some scheme to get the bullion. Pilot must be in on it. But Sandy! Weston had said that the guard would be on the plane. Horror seized Kirk. Sandy was in danger, or—— He forced the disquieting thought aside. No, Sandy couldn't be in on such a plan. But some one was on the inside, some one had known the plane was carrying the gold. And the rider he had spotted on the old Buckhorn Trail, the unloaded mules—he started with sudden insight.

That was it! They were packing it out by way of the abandoned trail. He remembered those unguarded words of Miller's about joining "Red" and the others at the car. It must be waiting on the road that ran up Tarp Canyon. A quick transfer of the gold, a flight out to the highway, and escape to the north. Perhaps the plane would then go on, to be wrecked and abandoned—out at sea, or in some inaccessible spot—to disappear.

Determination welled up in Kirk. He would get loose, stop them some way. He would get to Sandy. Must be some means to break these cords, something rough or sharp. His mind, keyed up by the need, supplied the answer. The old wash bench in the kitchen! There was a nail projecting underneath. He'd hidden under there one time, torn his clothes, and got a thrashing from Baldy. Baldy had said to leave the nail be; it would teach him to stay out from under there.

Kirk began to hunch his way along the floor. It seemed a long way by that awkward method. Through the doorway and across the rough planking of the kitchen. He reached the bench, and began rubbing the cords that bound his wrists across the spike point. The point slipped off, gashed his flesh. He felt a smarting and a stickiness on his hands as he persisted. It seemed to him that the cords were loosening. Suddenly a frayed strand parted. He worked faster. He freed his arms and clawed at the ropes binding his feet. Then he was erect, chafing the circulation back into arms and legs. He ran to a window, remembering the fastened door. He unhooked it, slid the sash to one side, and climbed through the opening. He began running across the clearing.

The germ of a plan had formed in Kirk's mind. He tore through the withered corn rows, rustling ghostlike in the wan light of a thin, crescent moon. Picking his way through the brush, he began climbing a steep spur that ran up out of the canyon, following the faint trace of an old stock trail. His captors, he felt sure, were riding down Goat Canyon. The men packing out the gold from the flat would be forcing their way through the underbrush of the old Buckhorn Trail. The two portions of the band would be following the two converging sides of a letter "A," the meeting point being a darkened car waiting in Tarp Canyon. Above him on the ridge was a firebreak. It trended toward that old trail, cutting from one leg of the angle to the other, like the high crossbar of the "A." If he could get ahead of the riders and the loaded mules——

Steadily he climbed. He skirted chaparral tangles, ran across little open spaces. The last fifty feet he scrambled up a knifelike backbone. Then he gained the ridge. Kirk drew a deep breath into his lungs, and ran. The break was clear of brush, but pitted with grub holes where roots had been cut out. It was tricky footing in the vague light. Sometimes Kirk stumbled, but he plunged on. It was uphill and

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down as the break followed the contour of the ridge. He scrambled through rocks, slid down steep places. In spite of his rawhide tough body his heart pounded, his lungs seemed bursting. Kirk gritted his teeth and ran on. He thought fleetingingly of the lookout station. Weston would take care of that end. He must have heard at least a part of the struggle at the tower, before the attacking pair could replace the receiver on the phone. Weston would have acted swiftly. Probably help had already reached the Sawtooth station. Laboring up a slope, Kirk felt a thrill of relief as he made out dimly the pole line. Up there was the junction of the two ridges, and a phone call box. He toiled up to the crest. The firebreak swerved here, following the new ridge toward the flat. He could look down into Buckhorn Canyon. And halfway down that steep slope, threading the brush of the canyon side, ran the old trail. He could trace its course back toward the flat.

Kirk leaned against the post, breathing jerkily through dry lips. He could see no riders on that trail. Was he too late—had they already passed? He strained his ears. Hard to hear with all that blood pounding in his head. Then, faintly, he caught the muffled thud of hoofbeats, the crackling of brush. It was back toward the flat. Kirk tore open the phone box. He got the Sawtooth tower, recognized the answering voice as Sanford's. He heard the patrolman's amazed cry.

"I'm all right," Kirk assured him swiftly. "I was knocked out by a couple of masked men, tied up, and left down Goat Canyon. Got loose and hot-footed for the old Buckhorn Flat Trail, hitting along the firebreak. Just made the call box. What has become of Weston?"

"Riding along the break, heading your way." Sanford's words came in an excited rush. "Packing a rifle. Said he figured something was wrong over toward Buckhorn. What's——"

"Get all the boys out and rouse the camps," cut in Kirk hurriedly. "Make the wires hum, Sanford. We've got to get escape through Tarp Canyon blocked. A plane carrying bullion from the Lone Condor Mine came down on Buckhorn Flat. Understand? Bandits are packing out the gold to a car waiting on the Tarp Canyon road. Got to cut them off. That car mustn't get out. I'll try to hold them up for a while. Hurry, Sanford!"

He clashed up the receiver as he heard the patrolman's curt, "O. K." Kirk darted across the break. He began working along the ridge above the old trail. It would tax every nerve to reach the point he was aiming at before the riders with the pack mules could pass. He could stop them—if he could reach that ledge. Big Nest, he and Sandy had called it, when they had discovered it in one of their wild scramblings. It was where an old watercourse came down a steep gully, dropping from one shelf to another. On the widest ledge they had found scattered boulders strewn about in a rough circle—that had suggested their name. And down below, the trail crossed crumbling granite. Kirk recalled how they had wondered just what would happen if those rocks came crashing down. A landslide—just a chance—Kirk flung a desperate glance back toward the flat and plunged on.

Now he was dropping down a little spur, working his way into the watercourse. He lowered himself from one shelf to another, finally slid down to the wide ledge. He was torn, scratched, gasping, legs shaking from his long run. He stooped behind a boulder and heaved, lifting and straining. It rolled forward. He trundled it over and over till it balanced on the rim of the ledge. It toppled, and crashed down. Loosened rock fragments dribbled after it, sifting, trickling, swelling to a stream. With

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desperate haste, Kirk rolled another rock to the brink. Over it went, crashing down to the bottom of the canyon. Those hoofbeats were close now. The stream of loosened rock swelled. The air was thick with dustlike particles.

Echoes crashed and boomed up from the canyon. He heard shouts of alarm, then galloping hoofs. They were aroused to the danger that the trail might be blocked by falling rock; they were running the pack mules. He heard the jingle of bit chains, the slapping of leather, the snapping of brush as they crashed their way forward, cursing, shouting. Kirk drew a sobbing breath between his teeth, and thrust with all his strength at a big rock poised near the brink. A sharp yell of discovery rang out from the trail. A flash stabbed upward as a carbine cracked. The bullet whined off the face of the ledge. As Kirk strained at the rock, an angry babble broke out. His presence there on the ledge, the sifting, dribbling rock fragments, made his purpose clear. A bull voice bellowed commands. Down below he could see the riders trying to force the stubborn mules past the crumbling stretch of trail. Kirk heaved again. The rock seemed to hang suspended for a moment, then crashed downward. A section of cliff, loosened by the movement of rock, seemed to detach itself suddenly. With a roar, the slide became an avalanche. Kirk stood motionless, staring down.

The fringe of that torrent of rock caught the pack mules. They were struggling in the débris of the trail, lurching, plunging. Had they been caught in the center of that stream it would certainly have meant death. As it was, they were borne down, plunging and scrambling, and lodged in a thick tangle of scrub a hundred yards below. To Kirk it seemed a miracle that they were not engulfed. The avalanche crashed down into the canyon, bearing all before it. Fragments of rock cracked and boomed. The dust settled. A great gap yawned in the trail. It flashed over Kirk that it was going to be difficult to get the frightened animals up out of that tangle, lead them up to the trail, get them repacked. As the bandits grasped the situation, yells of execration rose. A voice shouted hoarsely:

"Get him! Let's get him!"

A man scrambled up the bank from the trail, began climbing toward the ledge. Others, catching fire from him, plunged upward, following. Their shouts of rage died as they met stiffer climbing. Shots were fired. Bullets spattered Kirk with rock chips. He crouched down, out of the line of fire. Should he risk showing himself, try to climb up out of the gully? It was almost certain death. Pulling himself up, swinging from one hold to another, he would be a perfect target. A hail of bullets would be directed at him. Kirk flung a trapped glance about, then risked peering over the ledge. One man had outstripped the others, swinging himself upward expertly. Kirk fumbled for a heavy rock fragment. He waited. Coolly the man climbed toward him, carefully picking hand and footholds, mounting swiftly. The others, blown by their efforts, halted, watched closely. Kirk stared down. Something familiar about that tall, rangy frame. He noticed the big six-gun in a belt holster. Closer—— Now the man was peering up. Kirk felt suddenly weak. Sandy! The man was Sandy!

Kirk's hand tightened on the rock, quivering. Sandy was with the band! His fingers twitched, then his hand relaxed limp and nerveless. He couldn't swing his arm, couldn't send that rock crashing down on Sandy's head, see him lose his hold, fall—— With a choking cry Kirk swayed to his feet, standing there in the light where Sandy could see him. Twice one of the watchers far below fired, the bullets whistling close. Kirk did not heed them. He tried to

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cry out to Sandy, but only an inarticulate cry came from his lips. Then he heard Sandy's voice, hailing the watchers below:

"Don't shoot, Red! You nearly got me with that shot! I'll get him!"

Coolly he drew himself nearer the ledge. His right hand dropped to his gun butt. It flashed through Kirk's mind that his brother was a dead shot. A low cry burst from his lips:

"Sandy!"

His brother's foot loosened a dribble of rocks. Cutting through the sound of their fall, Kirk heard a tense, sibilant whisper:

"Kirk! When I shoot—drop! Understand? Pretend you're hit!"

Sandy's gun barrel flicked up, spat flame. The crashing report was flung back from the canyon wall. Kirk staggered. He spun around, crumpled down on the shelf. The bullet had buried itself harmlessly in a pile of loose rock. Sandy yelled shrilly, a fierce shout of triumph which was echoed by the two watchers below. Next moment he had swung himself up onto the ledge. He stooped and caught Kirk's hand with eager fingers.

"Kirk, old kid!" A little tremor ran through Sandy's voice, the grip of his hand tightened. "Gosh, I'm glad none of those shots got you! Thought it must be you up here. No one else would have known of this place." He shot a swift glance about the shelf, mouth setting grimly. "Lie still!" he commanded sharply. He showed himself at the brink of the ledge.

"Ain't dead, Red," he called down. "He says they got the mountains roused against us." In some subtle way his tone hinted treachery. "Some one in that other bunch must have squawked, they're hep that we're headed out Tarp Canyon. This jasper says there's a posse waiting to cut us off——"

"What!" snarled Red. Suspicion and murderous rage rang in his voice. He began scrambling upward. "I'll get the low-down—— Let me talk to——" His voice choked as he puffed and grunted, hauling his big frame up the steep canyon side. His awkward movements sent showers of rock particles sifting down onto the man farther down the slope. "You comin', Sim?" roared Red impatiently.

"If you'll quit pawin' rock!" Sim's tone was plaintive. Sandy chuckled.

"I thought that would bring Red up here," he whispered to Kirk. He stepped back, squatting down out of sight. "Listen! That's big Red, and the fellow below him is Simmons, the crook pilot. I'll knock out Red just as he makes the ledge. Ease him back out of sight, grab his gun, and make a quick job of tying him. But keep low—don't let 'em see you! After we get Red we'll tend to Simmons. All clear?"

Kirk nodded understanding. He lay sprawled out grotesquely, as if shot. He heard the big outlaw drawing nearer to the shelf, then his growled words close at hand:

"Give me a hand up, Smith!"

Through slitted eyes Kirk saw Red's head as he peered over the ledge, taking in Kirk's slack form.

Sandy stooped, and reached down. Red swarmed up, getting a knee on the shelf. Then Sandy's gun barrel flicked out, thudded against Red's head. As he fell, Sandy jerked him forward. Kirk rolled over swiftly, coming to a crouching position. He gripped the slack arms, dragged the unconscious man to the center of the ledge. Quickly he stripped him of belt and holstered gun, then with strips of Red's shirt lashed hands and feet. Sandy hissed warningly. A shadow fell on the ledge, and Simmons complained:

"We ought to be hightailin'——"

Sudden suspicion shot into his voice, as he sensed something wrong. He tried to swing the carbine's barrel up. Sandy's left hand darted out, struck the gun

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aside, just as Simmons's finger jerked the trigger. The spurt of flame seared his side. Then the barrel of Sandy's gun crashed just back of the pilot's ear. The man's cry ended in a groan. The carbine dropped from nerveless fingers, slid down the slope. Simmons toppled backward, would have crashed downward if Kirk had not seized his arm. Sandy and Kirk pulled the limp body onto the shelf, quickly trussed him up. They tied the two men together, pulling them still farther back from the edge. Kirk looked at Sandy, then began buckling on Red's belt gun.

"That's two of them," Sandy McKinnon said quietly. "But the big game is ahead." He swung himself down off the ledge, Kirk following closely. "That car in Tarp Canyon——"

"Won't escape," Kirk assured him grimly. In a few words he sketched in the situation. "No possible way they can break through," he declared confidently. "Right now the boys'll be creeping up on 'em, penning 'em tight in Goat and Tarp Canyons——"

"Kirk-k! Ho-o! Kirk!"

A long-drawn hail in the distance. It came from above them, back along the ridge near the call box. Weston's voice. Joyfully, Kirk answered, shouting that all was clear. He and Sandy ran back along the trail. Two dark shapes loomed ahead of them, snorted in alarm, galloped away toward the flat. The outlaws' horses, thought Kirk swiftly. He realized that their chances of catching the animals, restless and frightened from the firing, were slim. On the canyon side they could hear a crashing in the brush as the big ranger plunged down toward the trail, leading his big bay. He emerged from the brush, mounted, and galloped toward them. He reined in sharply as he recognized Sandy. Hurriedly, Kirk explained.

"Huh!" Weston stared at them. "Two of them tied up on a ledge! And the gold safe. What you two been——"

He flung up his hand warningly. They listened. Faintly, coming from the direction of Tarp Canyon, shots spattered out. A burst of firing, a lull, then a few scattered reports.

"Come on!" cried Sandy. He began running at top speed toward the break. Weston reached down a huge hand. With a spring, Kirk was up behind the saddle. They galloped toward the break, dismounted at the edge of the slide. Scrambling quickly through the loose shale, Sandy was nearly across. Weston left the horse at the edge, plunged after Kirk. They scrambled across through the soft, sliding rock, gained the trail on the other side, Weston gripping his rifle. Sandy cried softly, motioning for silence.

They caught the faint drumming of hoofbeats in the distance. The sound swelled—riders coming fast—spurring furiously toward them along the old trail. A shot cracked faintly, then another.

"Some of them broke through!" breathed Kirk excitedly. His hand tightened on the butt of the six-gun. "Must have fought their way clear. Trying to join Red." He strained his eyes, peering down canyon through the faint light.

"We'll set a trap for them," whispered Sandy. His glance swept the brush-covered slope above the trail. "Suppose you climb the bank, Weston. Find cover where you can rake 'em with cross-fire from that rifle. Kirk'll hole up the same way but about thirty feet down canyon. I'll take cover here. After they've passed Kirk, I'll step out and stick them up. If they show fight, we've got 'em!"

Weston nodded acceptance of the plan. They scrambled to their positions, and crouched down, waiting. Kirk tensed behind a clump of buckhorn, scanning the trail. The thump of galloping horses grew louder. He thought he could see moving blobs of

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shadow. Now they were threshing through the young growth underfoot, hurtling toward him. He drew a deep breath, thumbed the Colt's hammer back. Two riders crashed by. He saw Sandy spring out, gun leveled.

"Up with them!" His barked command cracked like a whip.

The leading horseman cried out hoarsely, his mount rearing as he jerked it backward. He fired. Sandy's gun flashed, roared. The second rider cracked down on Sandy, just as Kirk shot. In a moment of terror, he saw Sandy stagger, fall. The crash of Kirk's .45 merged with the sharp, whip-like crack of Weston's rifle. The leader jerked, swayed, then pitched slowly from the saddle. The second rider was down, the horses were milling and plunging, snorting in fright. Kirk leaped to the trail, ran forward gun in hand. He saw Sandy lurching to his feet, Weston was leaping down toward them. It was all over in a few bewildering seconds.

"I'm all right." Sandy was gripping his right hand, red drops trickling from his squeezed finger tips. "The one you downed, Kirk, numbed my gun hand with a .45 slug. Tore the gun out of my hand, turned me clear around!" He bent down, and rolled one of the fallen outlaws over. A sharp exclamation escaped him.

"Look!" A match flared, cupped in his hand so the tiny glow of light was flung downward. Kirk saw a face set in the grimace of death, teeth showing whitely through a curling black beard. Weston started, cried out in astonishment.

"Yager!" He knelt swiftly, gazing fixedly at the bearded face, then turned to Sandy. "Orde's partner, Yager!" The ranger's tone was bewildered.

"Yes," stated Sandy quietly. "The other one is Pete Zird, one of the bandit bunch that jumped us near Oro. I recognized him when he dropped. But Yager was the brains of the outfit." They straightened up. "He was rooking George Orde, stealing concentrates. I got hep to it—after I recognized Yager." Sandy fumbled in an inner pocket, and passed a small metal object to Weston. The ranger turned it to catch the light. It was the badge of a United States marshal. Weston relaxed. Kirk felt a little thrill of pride.

"Couldn't believe you were in with Red and Simmons," Weston said.

"I was after Yager," calmly explained Sandy. "He busted out of a Federal pen a year ago—still had some time to do. When I discovered he was bilking Orde, decided to give him a little rope. We happened to want that Oro bunch, too. Yager planned that attack on the pack train. We managed to get

"Due to your gun play," cut in Weston quickly. "I heard about it from Orde."

Sandy McKinnon grunted. "Anyway, that fell through. So he talked Orde into sending the gold through by plane. Cooked up the idea of the decoy shipment by pack train, and everything. Pretty smooth, eh?" Sandy glanced down the trail. Some of the posse riders could be heard pounding their way up the canyon. "He knew Simmons, the crook pilot who fell in with the scheme. I smelled a rat, and sounded Yager out." A note of contempt crept into Sandy's voice. "He's like many crooks—he figured I was out for graft. He couldn't very well object to Orde's idea that I travel on the plane as a guard; I had to be handled some way. Yager decided it was cheaper to let me in. But he held out on me—outfigured me, Weston."

"How?" demanded the ranger. He was listening closely.

"The original plan was to land fifteen miles from here," answered Sandy. "That clearing at Dutch John's at the mouth of Live Oak Canyon. I tipped Orde off. We had men hidden ready through——"

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to grab the whole bunch. First I realized I was sold was when Simmons yelled we had to go down, a forced landing on Buckhorn Flat. I was suspicious but had to accept it at face value."

"Trouble with the plane was faked, wasn't it?" questioned Kirk shrewdly. Sandy chuckled dryly.

"Yeah, Simmons fixed that. But he really did damage her making that landing. Claimed he couldn't go on. The plan was for Simmons to take off again soon as we'd unloaded, abandon the plane in some inaccessible spot. I have a hunch he didn't trust Yager too much; felt better going along with the gold. Anyhow, I was sunk. A useless posse miles away, up at Dutch John's on a false lead. Red told me Yager had changed plans, was waiting for us with a car up Tarp Canyon. Sim and Red were watching me close—I decided to stand pat, start something when we got to the car. Then Kirk horned into the game——"

"Had to do something." Kirk's voice was defensive.

"You did plenty," Sandy said warmly. He turned to Weston. "Kirk's the man who ruined Yager's scheme. First place, he busted loose after they tied him up in pap's old place. Then he cut across country, making a race a Zuni runner couldn't match. He turned in a general alarm, then started that landslide to delay things a bit. It swept the trail away, and put the pack mules and bullion out of the picture——"

"Aw, shucks, Sandy!" protested Kirk. He felt his face flushing at his brother's praise.

"Shucks, nothing!" Sandy McKinnon spoke with emphasis. "Gosh, Weston, you oughtn't to leave a man like Kirk on lookout. It's plumb wasteful! With a start like this night's work, Kirk'd go a long way as a Federal marshal. And you wait until I tell George Orde what he did! Orde will just about insist on Kirk going up to the mine——"

"Thanks, Sandy." Kirk realized he was not thrilled at either prospect. He considered for a moment, while the riders of the posse drummed toward them. The familiar ridges seemed to lean closer to him. "I'm used to Sawtooth—and the boys—and the service. Reckon I like the forest service. Going to stick with Tiny. Going to be a ranger, Sandy."

Weston's big hand gripped Kirk's shoulder. Some current of understanding seemed to flow from it. In that moment the real meaning of the tower on Sawtooth came home to him.

CALIFORNIA'S STATE GAME FARM

THE pheasant is a favored game bird in California. But the climate of this State is so varied that the pheasant prefers only certain parts. In order to give pheasants to all of California, the State conceived the idea of breeding birds that could live in any climate, from the warm ranges of the valleys to the High Sierras. With this in mind a game farm was started several years ago in Napa County, near Yountville.

The farm was equipped with modern incubators, sanitary feeding and breeding pens. Pheasants of all varieties were brought in, in order to find the kind that would be best suited to varied climatic conditions. The birds were fed a scientific diet. As a result of a few years of careful breeding, great numbers of hardy ringnecked pheasants that have been freed from the farm may be seen running about the surrounding countryside.

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Tricky Micky, Cowhand

By Clem Yore

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

TRICKY MICKY O'BRIEN has never believed that his father's death was an accident. Old Tom Hearn retells the story of the quarrel with Jud Burgis, and the red-fingered hand holding a gun that streaked through the air as O'Brien fell. Micky fires at Burgis's son, Jim, caught cheating at cards, and leaves town, meeting as he goes Molly O'Doon. A reward is offered for Micky. In Querida he is hired by Hank Withers, who wants a gunman to get rid of Pietro Ensenada. Micky unwittingly offends Pietro by winning all the rodeo prizes and the admiration of the lovely Fransisca. The dancer asks Micky to come to the Silver Slipper that evening. A cowboy, Whipple, advises Micky to leave town and he agrees—after he has kept his date with Fransisca.

(BACK NUMBERS ARE EASILY PROCURED.)

CHAPTER VI.

THE DANCE OF DEATH.

THAT same night Querida throbbed with gayety! And yet those accustomed to the night fun after rodeos sensed tragedy in the air—and Half-mast Mondell was one of these.

Like some scarecrow of a man he slithered, moving lazily, aimlessly, here, there, everywhere; and like the night breeze he made no sound, save a swishing noise as he shambled into *tabernas, cantinas,* cafés. No one had a moment for him. His very presence was like that of some image of gloom. Half-mast Mondell always herded alone, when he was in a town. Some even called him "Bad-luck-on-foot."

In a *cantina,* the best in Querida, the Silver Slipper, an orchestra was picking chords, softly playing concertinas, moving bows slowly across strings; but this desultory practise forecast the fury which would be with those players when the blood of the night flowed hot.

Near a window sat Pietro Ensenada and some of his crew. He was waiting; one could tell that by the eager, fretful manner with which he watched the door;

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and outside, under that window, merged into the black shadows of a pepper tree, prone upon a cottonwod log which served him as a seat, stretched Half-mast Mondell, ears cocked to the low Spanish talk coming from Pietro and his band. Then the door flew open and in rushed a horseman, dust-covered, winded, young, savage in his anxiety to reach his leader, Pietro Ensenada.

"Well, Carlos, what news?" asked Pietro ferociously.

"All is well. At midnight fifty of your men will be here. They will halt their horses back of the corrals. But here is what made me wind my pony. Read that!"

Carlos laid a sheet of paper before Pietro's eyes. Ensenada read, grinned, broke into a loud laugh, raised his voice so that Half-mast heard what he read from that paper.

"My brave one," snarled Ensenada, "here is luck! Now I have something with which to feed my hate, in a legal way. This hard-riding Irish kid is none other than Tricky Micky from Texas. There he shot a man, over six weeks ago, and there are a thousand golden pesos on his head—dead or alive! Dead or alive! But only Pietro Ensenada will do the gun work. You understand, all of you, now? I pull the trigger! I do the killing! The gold shall go in equal shares to each of us. Where got you this paper, Carlos?"

"A vaquero riding west, through Chihuahua, on his way to Guzman, is tacking these things along his road. That riding gringo is headed for San Clemente and has been sent this way by Jud Burgis. He would have come here, for he wants to see you, but is in a hurry. Instead, he sent this letter to you. It contains his message."

Half-mast heard an envelope torn open; then a deep guttural tone of satisfied chuckling.

"Friends," said Ensenada, "this is fine news. We will ride fast after I have settled with Tricky Micky O'Brien. We go far, and at the end of the ride will have much excitement. Drink, my brave fellows, but the man who gets drunk stays behind. Here is a command from Burgis. We have a work for us and pay—what pay!"

Half-mast waited for no more.

He moved like a giant bug to the end of the building, where a swath of light revealed a door, and knocked upon its frame. An old man stuck out his head.

"This is the stage entrance of the Silver Slipper, is it?" falteringly asked Half-mast. "Where the dancing girls dress?"

"Yes, crazy one. What is it you want?"

"I would see Fransisca, the dancing girl."

"Away, you loon! What would Querida's sweetheart be doing with you?"

Fransisca, hearing her name, pushed out from a room.

"Who calls me here?" she asked, then seeing Half-mast she smiled. "What is it, old friend?"

"Come out here, where the shadows are."

Fransisca stepped into the night. Half-mast led her out of earshot of the door. No longer now was there that exasperating slowness to his voice; gone was the gloomy drawl, the insipidity of cadence. He talked in a rapid whisper.

"Pietro Ensenada will have fifty men back of the corrals at twelve o'clock. A rider just came to him and brought a reward notice of a man who is wanted in Texas. I want you to save that man."

"You mean the Irish *chico?*"

"Yes. His name is Tricky Micky O'Brien, and there is a reward of a thousand in gold upon his head, dead or alive. Ensenada means to earn that reward, to-night. He has vowed to do the killing himself. You must keep Tricky Micky inside the Silver Slipper,

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when he comes. I'll go warn the American cowboys."

"No, that will mean bloodshed. You let Fransisca arrange the escape of Tricky Micky. Go to the Sunrise Livery, see the owner, Tim Tolliver, and tell him I said for you to bring my pony to the stage entrance. Tie two canteens on the saddle, also nose-bags, filled, for two horses. Then, when Tricky Micky gets here, find his horse, and tie it beside mine. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. I'll arrange everything. And I will have a sack of food for you. You ride away with him, eh?"

"I ride to show him the way—that is all."

"Good!"

Fransisca stepped back onto the stage, hurried across it, down upon the public dancing floor, and over this to the orchestra stand. As she passed near to where Ensenada sat he shot her a wicked glance of malevolence.

"Juan," said the girl to the leader of the musicians, "you have my favorite waltz tune, eh?"

"*Si, señorita!* You mean, 'Where The Golden Rio Grande Flows'?"

"Yes. Watch me, after my appearance on the stage. I will occupy that table, right there. The one this side of Ensenada. You shall see some fun. When I shout to you, 'My dance, Juan!' play that great waltz, will you?"

"It shall be given as never man heard it before. I see a strangeness in your eyes. What is it? Murder?"

"Is it so ugly?"

"You mean——"

"I dance with a man from Texas. And if he can dance as he can ride you shall see a sight which you will describe to your grandchildren."

"The Irish keed, eh?"

"Exactly. Here is a bit of silver."

"Silver from you? Never! If you will dance, as I have seen you dance, that will be pay enough. It will intoxicate me."

"You shall see me dance in a very little while."

"Look, señorita, here comes the Irish keed, now!"

Into the Silver Slipper came Tricky Micky, alone.

Fransisca flew back to the stage, the orchestra struck up. Americans and Mexicans filed in out of the street. It was nine o'clock and the Silver Slipper's first performance opened at this time. The curtain rose, Micky selected a table, ordered a drink, and turned his eyes toward the stage.

Fransisca led a singing chorus; then appeared with a dancing clown; and after that gave her great solo, "The Wasp Of Valencia." After she had taken the last of her encores she hurried to her dressing room, where she slipped into a tightly fitting doeskin riding suit. On her head she stuck a small, rakish, crimson toque, and in her hand she carried a quirt. Fragile, dainty, amazingly beautiful, she appeared from a side stage door and hurried across the dance floor to where Micky sat sipping a claret punch. He immediately rose to greet her.

"Sure, was there ever the likes of a gurrl like you?" he said. "It's a roaring cow-lass you are, in them riggings, and what is it, now? A dance out here among all the vaqueros?"

"It is a dance with you. And the tune shall be 'Where The Golden Rio Grande Flows,' Do you dance?"

"Do I dance? Would a man have to dance with that tune in his ears and a gurrl like you in his arms? A stoten-bottle he'd be, turtle-gaited, and dead in the feet, if he couldn't shake a leg under them circumstances. Little lady, will you be after drinking a glass of red wine with me?"

"Not red wine, *mio* Micky! But champagne. Here comes the bottle now. Turn your head and look toward the bar. And take note of where Ensenada is sitting. I will have a word to

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say with you while we dance. Careful now, he smells danger like a fox."

"Sure I got the lay of him as I came this way. I'm covering his table from where I sit."

A waiter approached, carrying a bucket of ice in which were inverted glasses chilling, and a tall bottle of rare champagne. Then Fransisca arose, flung up her head, faced the men in the room, and cried in a voice of gladness.

"Friends, in honor of the rodeo winner I have dressed as a cowgirl. I am now to waltz with Micky O'Brien. Crowd close, but leave the dance floor free to us, just for a little while. Micky, have you a rope?"

"Here!" yelled the keeper of the Silver Slipper. "Here is a maguey trick rope, made by the hand of my old padre."

A coiled lass-rope sang through the air over the heads of the crowd and fell at the feet of the girl. She picked it up and giving it to Micky said:

"Build a wide loop and spin it. I shall dance in and out of it. Can you?"

"You mean the rope dance? Surely you do not mean the Chihauhua rope dance!"

The girl nodded and Micky fancied that her red lips became a trifle pale. He shook out a loop, spun it in a circular action, saw its snaky motion rise and fall, then danced nimbly into the air and was inside the noose now whirling like a living thing. Fransisca raised her voice and turned her face to the orchestra:

"My dance, Juan!" she exclaimed. Then to Micky she said, smiling: "When a girl dances in the circle of a rope with a man, do you know what that means in Mexico?"

"She tells the world," answered Micky, "that she's in love with him. You ought not to do this, señorita."

The music blared in an opening moan, the swish of the spinning rope sounded as the prelude died, then the waltz air stole through the room like a beautiful sigh. All was still.

Fransisca swayed away from Micky, a hand on a hip, her quirt lifted high and poised above her head, her eyes upon the whirling rope, and her feet gliding magically over the polished waxed floor; then, high in the air she leaped, to land at Micky's side, one arm around his shoulder, the other circling his waist. The posture struck instant applause from the onlookers. The room rang with hand-clapping and cries of admiration.

And as though that handsome pair was but exhibiting what had long been rehearsed, Tricky Micky and little Fransisca glided over the floor like two forms suddenly molded into one. It was a beautiful sight, made the more alluring because of that white, soap-weed lariat which seemed to be surrounding them and binding them in a symbolism of love as it lifted, halted, lowered, spun. Micky's wrist movement and the rise and fall of his arm added to the intriguing grace of the dance. Then the music stopped in a long-drawn sob. A shout went up. The crowd wanted more. This time Micky danced without the rope, flinging it to his chair.

Fransisca stole into his arms, his arms that circled her as though she were a flower, and away they stepped to a fresh madness of the music born out of the frenzy of the admiring musicians.

"Tricky Micky O'Brien, I know you. You killed a man in Texas, and the wolves are on your trail," murmured the girl.

"What is that you say, señorita?"

"Sssh! Listen, and do as I say. Ensenada is waiting to kill you. He has a reward-placard with him and means to earn one thousand golden pesos in blood money; but we shall fool him. When our waltz is over and the wine has been drunk, I shall tell the crowd that I will take you upon the stage to repeat the rope dance. And then, after

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we have disappeared, we will hurry outside, where your horse will be waiting with mine, and I will show you a way out of this country. There will be fifty men here to-night, for Ensenada means to fight you Americanos. But if he kills you, ah, that is all he wants!"

"How do I know you are not kidding me, señorita?"

"Look in my eyes!"

"I will do as you say. 'Tis a jewel ye are, Fransisca!"

"Then dance, Micky O'Brien! Dance! It is all I will ever ask of you. Our first, and our last, dance. Its memory will go with me to my grave."

"Why, there are tears in your eyes."

"Everybody in this room knows I am in love with you."

"Would you listen to that now? I wonder, Fransisca, if, by any chance, any of your forefathers could have been after kissing the Blarney stone. They do say, that in the old days, lots of them Spanish people came to Ireland for the black-eyed Irish gurrls, and learned the tongue-tickling of Blarney."

"I know nothing of the Blarney stone, but I know I was hurt in the heart when I saw you ride your first horse this afternoon. It is the way with my family. We love quickly, and but once. Hold me tightly, and let me close my eyes."

With Fransisca's head upon Micky's breast, her eyes closed, her little fingers clutching his pony-hide vest, they waltzed about the dancing floor like figures seen in a dream. When the music ceased, and they strolled to their chairs, there came no booming applause this time. What those hardened men had gazed upon was too sweet and lovely to cause anything but a deep serenity of emotion which silenced them. Reaching their table, Fransisca lifted a glass of the gold-yellow champagne now bubbling like bursting jewels.

"I drink a toast!" she cried. "A toast to a man! I drink to a two-time winner —a champion vaquero and a dancing caballero! When we have finished our wine we shall give an exhibition upon the stage. Do you want more of Micky and Fransisca?"

"*Si! Si!* More! Plenty more!"

"Don't drink that wine!" This command was flung by Ensenada.

Fransisca whirled about and paled as she saw Pietro Ensenada standing on the outer edge of the crowd against a wall. In his hand there gleamed a gun, and over his face there worked a savage play of snarling muscles which made of his countenance a forbidding sight. But the girl laughed, lifted the glass higher, then cried: "And why not, *lagarto?*"

That last word, that *"lagarto,"* rang like an insult in the room. Feet scraped, men swerved to walls, back of tables, the stove, to points of safety, for *lagarto* meant lizard, and this is an epithet which means a killing fight in Mexico.

"Do you think I am frightened of you? See, this is what I think of your threat!" continued Francisco.

The goblet descended toward the girl's lips. There was a roar in the room, a tinkle of glass, and Fransisca was sprayed with the costly wine. With the stem still in her hand she faced Micky, whose eyes were now rigidly fixed upon the body of Pietro Ensenada who stood, straddle-legged, facing him.

"Now for you, Tricky Micky O'Brien, you fugitive from the Texas law!" yelled Ensenada. "This is what you get for daring to make a fool of Pietro Ensenada. Mutter a prayer, you pig!"

His gun, which had bounced aloft after its explosion, was now coming slowly down, dropping while Pietro's thumb was seen jerking back its enormous hammer; but just as it approached a level where its barrel would have covered Micky's body there was a flash of the latter's right hand, a slap of leather was heard, suggesting a curse, and then a streak of flame spat out from Micky's

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hip. With a bewildered look spreading across his face Ensenada dropped to the floor, his eyes wide, his mouth open, his head sagging as he fell.

Fransisca reached for Micky's glass and lifting it on high cried:

"Did I not tell you? A toast, gentlemen! A toast to a man, a dancing man, a riding-and-roping man, and last of all a fast-and-furious fighting man!" She touched the w[illegible] to her lips, and seeing the crowd begin to mill she added in a louder voice: "Some of you drag out that body. I will take Micky up on the stage."

Micky was watching the Mexicans who were standing about Ensenada. But none of these men were giving the slightest sign of avenging the death of their leader. They suggested fear-numbed creatures betwitched by what they had just beheld.

"Come, Micky, back toward the stage. This is our time. A while ago I saw your big horse through the window."

Micky retreated toward the back of the house. Reaching the stage door he darted into it and slammed it. Fransisca hurried through the wings and out upon the street.

"Here, over here!" a snapping, deep voice boomed.

Micky raced after the girl, lifted her to a saddle, and as he touched a boot to a stirrup and gathered up the reins of his bridle he felt a hand pressing on his arm.

"Good luck, you Irish rider!"

"Well, if it ain't me ould friend of the burro," greeted Micky. "Half-mast, here's a coin for you. It'll buy you some bacon and a bit of baking powder."

Half-mast Mondell gripped Micky's hand as the boy gave him a five-dollar gold piece. Then Fransisca swung away and darted into the gloom. Micky raced after her, a sob in his throat, bitter emotion bringing the tears.

Fransisca rode like a cavalryman, and darting down alleys they came at last into the flats where the prickly pear loomed like rows of ghastly, human shapes. Querida suddenly hummed behind them.

CHAPTER VII.

HIDDEN BRANDS.

ONLY the sound of the running horses broke into the gloom. But to the beat of these there rang a similar tattoo in Micky's brain. It seemed a cruel thing that for the second time in his life his gun had spat death at a fellow being. This filled him with a desperate, bitter, almost unquenchable desire to turn savage; to throw away what was best and dearest to him—his sense of decency—and to become one of the legion of the lost which claimed so many of the desert. Then, somehow, Fransisca seemed to attract him. What if this child-woman were in love with him? Suppose she should suffer because of what she had done? He would speak to her about this.

"Fransisca, you cannot go back, eh?" he asked.

She had been weeping, and with difficulty she raised her face, stifled a sob, gave vent to a small laugh, and then tossed her head.

"Cannot go back, Micky? And why not?"

"Would they not give you trouble?"

"Pietro Ensenada might have done this, but is he not dead?"

"I don't know. I shot him, quickly. I aimed at his upper body. I am sorry, señorita. I am not a killer of men."

"There is much that troubles me, Micky. Would you know something?"

"Fransisca, what is it you say? Would I know something?"

"Micky, it is two weeks ago since Hank Withers came to Querida. He told me that you were handsome, a great rider, a fine shot. He gave me gold, I am to get more; plenty gold, maybe, to-morrow."

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"Speak out, my girl, there is a mystery in your words. Why would Hank Withers give you gold?"

"He wanted me to make Pietro Ensenada jealous. He told me it was just fun; but I knew he had something else in his mind. Then, to-day, at the rodeo, Harry Orchard, trail boss for Withers, told me that if I could bring about a meeting, a fight, between you and Pietro that there would be much gold—five hundred yellow pesos—for me. I fell in with that scheme. I played at love, played at a deep game, in front of all the people, at the rodeo grounds; before those drinking men in the Silver Slipper; but——"

"How can there be a 'but' to such talk as this from the dainty lips of a gurrl like you?"

"But when I danced with you I spoke the truth."

"About what, pray?"

"About the way my family loves."

This answer stilled Micky for a while and he jogged on, a furious anger rising in him. He saw it all now. Hank Withers, knowing him to be a fast man with a gun, had plotted to have him do a killing job. Hank Withers it was who had killed Ensenada. Yes, none other. And he had paid for the cruel trick in money. Quickly Micky raised his head, touched Fransisca, leaned toward her.

"If you don't mind, señorita, I'll be after leaving you here. I'm not wanting to have you run any further risk on my account. Good-by to you, and may the saints watch over and keep you."

"You cannot leave me now, Micky! Not now! I was to blame, but I did not think Ensenada would try to kill you in the Silver Slipper. I meant to get you away. Really, I did. It was Half-mast Mondell who told me that Ensenada had received a reward notice. And it was Half-mast whom I sent for your horse and for mine. That old desert rat is a brave man, Tricky Micky. He overheard Ensenada talking to his band and ran to me to get me to warn you. Why? I do not know; but at the grounds, this afternoon, I'm sure he wanted to talk with me. He stood near my box and several times I thought he seemed eager to get me alone. Again he was near me when I kissed you on the cheek. Had it not been for him you would have been killed. Now you talk of leaving me, after I have risked so much to get you out of this evil country!"

"I'm no green hand in a tough country. I'm quitting you because I do not want them to get you because of what you did for me."

"Pooh! There is a man in Tajo who is crazy about me and these Ensenada bandits would not dare hurt me for fear of him. When you are over the Looking Glass Desert, and headed for Great Horned Owl Pass, I will be happy—not till then. After that I shall return to Querida, pack up my things, and head for Tajo and San Clemente. But first I want to talk with Ensenada, if he has not died."

"Why, girlie?"

"It was this man who made of my brother Phillipo a thief. He was a grand horseman, a fine roper, and was doing well until Ensenada made him drunk and took him on a raid. Since then my brother has not been seen. Either he is afraid to show his face, or he is dead. Ensenada knows. If he is dead, some of his band must tell me of Phillipo. I will not rest until I discover where he is and try to save him. I fear he is with this Burgis crowd; but I am sure Ensenada knows, or some of his men."

"I am sorry I shot Ensenada, Fransisca. It is an ugly thing to kill a man, señorita."

"But it is no evil to kill a snake. Had you not killed him, I would have done so soon. I am sure of this. Ensenada is the Chihuahua end of an international band of cattle-and-horse thieves. Burgis, of San Clemente, is at the head of

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this system of murder and robbery—Burgis, a Texan."

"Fransisca, it was a Burgis whom I shot in Texas."

"The fingers of Fate, Micky, move slowly across our lives; but they move always, and we obey. We are but pawns in the game of living—little pawns. And all our loves, and hates, and joys, and sorrows, ah! These are but the strings the gods pull to work us like mannikins on wires. It is bitter, but it is true. Why did you kill this Burgis?"

Briefly, Micky described the death of his father; his first leaving Marfa; his return; the fight, and his escape, and how he came to go to work for Hank Withers.

"So that old American cowman showed you the reward notice the very first night of your arrival at his ranch?" asked the girl.

"Yes, and it was that which told him I was a fast shot, and a good man with horses and with a rope."

"Then he paid your entrance money at the rodeo, and came to see me. I can see his reason now, Micky. He wanted Ensenada removed as a menace to him and his ranch. Everybody will applaud you for this killing, and when Ensenada's band is scattered, you could return to Withers and be his best rider."

"I will give him a piece of my mind when I clap an eye on him. But, like you, Fransisca, I believe in destiny; and, somehow, I have a feeling in my heart that some day, perhaps soon, I am to meet the man who has a red finger nail. Heaven help me for saying it, but that man I shall kill as I would a rattler. That is the debt I owe to my beloved father."

"A red finger nail? What do you mean?"

And then Micky told her what Tom Hearn had told him, and repeated his conviction that Tom Hearn had not been "seeing things" that night when Mickey's father had been killed by his own gun. At the conclusion of his narrative Fransisca lapsed into a deep silence. Presently she spoke.

"Describe that finger nail, Micky. The thought of it is like a bad-luck omen. Tell me so that I, too, may be on the lookout for such a hideous sign. White flecks I have seen in finger nails, but these, they say, are signs only of approaching death. Bright-red finger nails, ugh! Paint me a picture to carry in my brain."

"I shall give you Tom Hearn's very words, for these are stored away in the burning core of my brain. Here's what he said: 'It was like a hand seen in a nightmare. The fingers were long and knotted—powerful; and the forefinger stood out like a hideous, pointing omen. Its nail was split, and humped in the center, and bright-red, except for that white ridge.' Does that sound like the talk of a drunken man? I tell you, Fransisca, Tom Hearn saw a hand just after it had yanked out my father's gun and had fired that weapon into my father's back. The gun was being tossed away when Tom's dazed eyes caught the image of that nail on those awful fingers. I am to meet that man, I feel it in my bones."

"'Split, humped in the center, bright red, except for a white ridge,' There'll be no mistaking that, Micky. Fransisca shall look at the hands of all Americanos from this hour. But what good will it do? You will be gone."

"Yes, I shall be gone; but if you discover such a man write to Denny Larkin, care of Tom Blanchard, Marfa, Texas. Here, I'll write down those names for you on a page of my tally book, which is in my saddle pocket."

When he had written Denny's and Blanchard's addresses Micky handed the paper to the girl.

"Fransisca, where is the town called San Clemente?" he asked.

"It is west of here, across two ranges

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I do not know how far. It is a new town, and it is there that Ensenada and his band used to go frequently. Burgis came there, and it is said the camp is one of the wickedest in all this evil country. Just what makes you ask that?"

"Do you intend going there, Fransisca?"

"I am a dance girl. I go where there is quick money. Besides, I think I shall hear of Phillipo there. Why?"

"Long Tom Blanchard has a branch bank there. If things get too hot for me I shall head that way. Blanchard was the banker of my father, and he is a square man. Tell him anything you would tell to me. And ask him how to find me, if you come to San Clemente. Ask him about your brother. He'll help you."

"I shall not forget. Look, Micky! See how the moon is coming up? See, there, directly before us! It is perfect. The Great Horned Owl Pass."

Across the wide swale, out beyond the shadows of the horizon hills, tusking the sky, and shaped by the light of the moon behind it, there certainly appeared a mountain which resembled the form of a great snowy owl, the horns of which shot up into the moonlit heavens.

"And how could a pass be in such a place, Fransisca?"

"It is there, just the same. It crosses those far hills between the tufts of feathers which are the horns of the owl. That is why it gets its name. There are not ten men who know of such a route across that divide. From the desert the idea of such a climb would never occur to any one; but within a few hours I will show you a deer and cattle trail up which your horse can easily walk. Once on that path, Micky, and you are as safe as if you were three days ahead of any riders from Querida. Those who follow you must go around the range, or travel far north and cross over at Gunsight."

Dawn was shooting the eastern sky full of delicate hues when the foot of the little-known trail was reached. Micky and the girl stood, hands clasped, staring into each other's eyes.

"Good-by, Micky, and good luck! Straight up is your route."

"Adios, Fransisca. I've been thinking this night that we'll meet again. And when the clouds of my troubles have been blown away, and it'll be safe for me to go combing these sands, I'll be after riding 'em for you. I'm not forgetting what you have done for me to-night."

"And I'm not forgetting what you have done to me, to-night. Will you grant me but a trifle?"

"All I can do would be but little enough. What is it you want?"

"Carry this!" She handed him a small buckskin bag which she had drawn from her neck.

"Bless your heart, is it a precious family relic you're giving to a wild one like me to lose it in my traveling?"

"In there are the luck symbols of the Yaquis which my father carried till he died. It is said that these will ward off danger, enable him who carries them to tell friend from foe, and will keep the plague away from him. Take it, Micky, it is all I can wish for you—long life, and happiness."

He accepted the token; and as he looked at it Fransisca wheeled about her pony and spurring it darted away without looking behind her. In the adjacent vegetation she was lost to view before she had traveled two hundred yards. Micky set Barry up the trail, and when the sun came over the horizon he was on top of the ridge, directly between two giant chimney stones which formed the horns of the owl. Back of him lay the monstrous wasteland; before him he looked down into a wide expanse where he could see the shimmer of several rivers, the green of forested hill slopes, the patch after patch of meadowlands.

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Beside a small stream, just off the trail, he unsaddled Barry, made camp, ate the lunch Half-mast Mondell had stuffed in his saddlebags; then tied his horse to a stake and went to sleep. It was nearly noon when he awoke.

Far down the hills he caught a rising spiral of thin, blue vapor. Smoke! Here was a house, people! Here were men, cowmen! Would they be friendly? Would they have information of him? Could he take the chance of showing himself at such a place? Resolutely he determined to take the risk. He needed food, shoes for Barry, directions on how to get west, and where lay the towns.

Saddling, he rode away, and as he neared the spot where he had seen the smoke it vanished. One instant it appeared topping a dead pine; the next it was gone; but he made a mental picture of the tree and after a while found it. It stood beside the trail. And while he could see through the thin timber for a long way he found no house. Then, as he was turning away, thinking the high air had led him to error, he caught the stale odor of burnt wood. And just beyond the tree he saw a small dead fire. He grinned.

"Them clever rannihans," he muttered. "They was using that fire just a while ago. Now I wonder where they went?"

He dismounted, examined the fire, poked into its dead ash with a stick and felt this grate against metal. Throwing the ashes aside he brought out two stamp irons. Both were warm on the brand ends, to which bits of seared flesh and strands of hair still clung. He read the designs easily.

"Sure, it's the cooking-stove brands they have down in this man's country," he mused. "Them irons would plaster a cow so's you could see who owned her a mile off."

From out of the valley of treetops he caught the sound of men hallooing at the tops of their voices. Micky knew what that meant. Cowboys were hazing cattle or horses, driving them fast along some trail, and the constant *yi-yipping* of their voices kept the animals at top speed. Then he heard a horse coming up the trail. Grasping the irons involuntarily, he darted into the undergrowth, moved Barry back of some brush and held his nose. Then he saw a man dart up the trail making for Great Horned Owl Pass. No mistaking the hurry or the intent of this rider, he was heading for that pass, the secret route leading across the high hills to Querida and on to Mexico.

As he swung into view, Micky, from his hiding place, got a good look at the man's face. It was thick, brutal; the eyes were strangely set, very close together, the ears large and outstanding. As the man approached he removed his Stetson, and Micky felt a revulsion as he saw the fellow's brow. This was low, apelike, and down almost to the meeting point of the eyebrows there ran a black, V-shaped mass of thickly matted coarse hair. That forehead was etched deep into Micky's memory at that swift lone glance. The man mopped his head and hurried on.

Concealing the irons under some thick bushes, Micky marked their position, mounted Barry, and singlefooted down the trail. In the valley he came upon a small, concealed corral in which were ten or fifteen horses. Obviously, from the manner in which they stood, they had just been branded. Micky approached the fence and from his saddle read the fresh burn on a big, chestnut thoroughbred.

"The Pig Pen ZZ," he mused. "Now maybe I did wrong in hiding them irons, after all. Sure, for a guy with a thousand on his head you're getting awful particular about the little business of stealing a cow or a broom tail."

On he rode, across the wild-hay meadows, seeing no houses, finding no fences, discovering no indications of a

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settled region. Topping a spur, he came to a high drift-fence made of pine and aspen. Down this he rode trying to find some section which he could easily take down to allow Barry to pass the fence. Then he came to a gate, hidden back of some thick brushwood. He opened this, passed through, and shut it.

Continuing down that slope and up the next, where there were tall, cool pines, and lots of heavy grass, he rode upon a few fine fat steers. Farther on, he rode beside a cluster of feeding cows. He was in a ranch country now. From all points came the sounds of mooing, calf-calling cows, and the deep challenging bawls of old bulls.

On the side of all the cattle he read the same brand—the Two Bar 77.

"Oh, oh," he pondered aloud, "I'm beginning to smell me a mouse. Now I wonder which way lays that Two Bar outfit, anyhow?" From the thicket on the opposite hill at which he stared he caught three quick reports. The distress signal! He spurred Barry forward and made for the sound of the firing.

CHAPTER VIII.

MICKY HEARS NEWS.

AS he topped the hill Micky saw three racing horsemen, ropes out, each leaning forward as though bent on dabbing his twine on some invisible object. What were they about to do? They passed a group of steers which, tails up, fled scattering into the brush. Then, ahead, where a few tall pines loomed, Micky saw a gleam of speckled white. A pony, a pinto pony, and it was weaving in and out among those heavy trees. Surely, this was what those ropers were after! They didn't want cows!

Of a sudden the paint horse vanished, to reappear in a small clearing. Now Micky got a good look at the racing little horse. It was flattened in a great ground-devouring stride, and was making for a thicket of jack-pine; but one of the pursuing riders cut across and it became obvious that this man would meet the pinto before it succeeded in reaching the shelter of the dense young forest. Of a sudden, Micky saw its rider. What kind of cowboy was this? What was a dude doing down in this country?

There was a flaming red jacket, a dot of purple for a hat, and the whitest breeches Micky had ever seen on a rider. Something gleamed in the hand of that rider, flashed aloft, and three shots in quick succession followed three white puffs of smoke above the paint horse. Full, sweeping comprehension crashed into Micky's mind. Those three men were trying to catch a woman! It was a woman who was riding that pinto! He waited for no more.

The foremost of the pursuers, mounted on a long-legged sorrel, was cutting down the lead of the pinto in fast style. In a few seconds that man's rope would nestle over the huddled little shape on the pinto's back.

Out came Micky's carbine from its boot beneath his left leg. Dismounting, he pumped a shell into its barrel, halted Barry with a word, and taking a quick shot sent a bullet that kicked up the grass immediately in front of the lone roper. He saw this man glance about, then stop his horse. Another shot smacked the ground almost under the rider, and two more sent dust flying in the faces of his companions that were following him.

Micky saw that every man was watching him, and while they were moving away, their eyes were upon him. He faced about, stared into the trees behind him, waved a hand, and shouted:

"Come on, boys! This way! I've got 'em!"

It worked! That bit of cunning drove quick fear into the trio of riders. They about-faced and tore for the shelter of the trees upon their back trail. Then they were gone.

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Micky turned his horse toward the jack pine into which the little pinto was about to plunge; and as he saw a white face staring at him he realized that this woman had undoubtedly seen what he had done. Giving Big Barry his head, Micky raced forward toward the pinto. Where a little clearing opened into the thicket Micky saw the pony, and above it a blanched, familiar face. The sight of those eyes, the pert little nose, the smiling mouth, above white, pitiful lips, sent a thrill through him.

"Why——" he began; but go no further. A glad light leaped into the girl's frightened eyes, a rose tinge colored the pallor of her cheeks, and a sob of utter joy came from her.

"Micky! Micky O'Brien!" she exclaimed.

"Mm-m-m—Miss Molly O'Doon!" he gasped.

"Why didn't you say what you started to say?" she asked.

"Molly was what I was thinking. Now which way is it to a house?"

"My home is not much of a jog from this point."

"Then head out, I'll be loping at your stirrup. I'm all alone, Molly O'Doon, and hurrying through this man's land as fast as fortune will let me amble."

She stared at him, then swung about her pony and trotted off. When they had reached the bottoms where a fenced field loomed, they saw the three men darting along a hogback and headed south.

"Micky, you saved me from those fellows. They were half-breeds from Sonora. I knew them from the rigs they sat and the hats they wore. I ran into them and from their looks I knew they meant trouble. I didn't wait for words, but gave my pony, Jog Along, his head and started away. When I found they had their reatas out I knew I was in for it. I fired a distress signal, headed for the top of the ridge, thinking to tire out their broncs, but they gained on me. I fired a second signal and then saw you. But I thought you were another of those scoundrels till I saw you drop a bullet in front of the man nearest to me. Then I knew I was safe."

"And do you ride alone much, in a wild country like this, and the border so close?"

"This is the first time I have ever felt the least bit of fear. For years I've gone everywhere alone. Lately, however, there has been a lot of stealing of live stock. And the country is full of strange riders, going north or coming south. Where have you been?"

"Over near Querida, riding strays for Hank Withers. Now I'm heading some place, and all I know is, that I'm on my way."

"You poor boy! You're trying to run away from what you did at Marfa, eh?"

"You know about that?"

"Yes. And I know you did not kill Jim Burgis. You shot him through the shoulder and he was up and around before I left my uncle's ranch. Don't you worry about Marfa, Micky. You have all the good cowmen there back of you. And right now you can return any time you want."

Tears welled into Micky's eyes, and he lowered his head, so great was the emotional surged which flooded him.

"That's good news, eh?" asked Molly.

"Sure, Molly, it lifts a load from me heart and makes me as young as the birds; but that's not all. Will you be after listening to this now?" and he told her what had befallen him in Querida.

They jogged along until they saw the point of a big bunch of cattle coming into view over the brow of a hill. The following dust looked like smoke. Micky smiled.

"I'll be after letting you go now," he said. "There's safety riding where them cowboys are. You can make it now, can't you?"

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"Tricky Micky, it's not a step you are going but to my home to meet my old daddy. Do you think the O'Doons would be allowing an O'Brien to ride like a hunted coyote away into a nest of snakes like the Burgises or the Ensenadas? You're coming to the Two Bar 77 and I'm hoping that you'll like our country well enough so that you'll go to riding for our spread. See that sugar-loaf hill, way out in front of us? That's home, Micky! Your home, too!"

Home!

The word rang like music in his ears.

"Home?" he queried aloud. "Sure I'd like the feel of a place with a name like that. The only home I've known for the last seven years is the bee-stung fork of this old Fremont saddle. Home—by golly, Molly O'Doon, it's a bit of the twist of magic your tongue gives to a word like that! But, no, it wouldn't be right for me to go to work for your father. I'd be after bringing on a war along this border. Don't you think them Mexican pals of Ensenada's will lie down on me. And they'll carry grief to any outfit that gives me shelter. I have it on good authority that Jud Burgis is back of Ensenada's crew."

"Micky O'Brien, it is my own father who owns the Two Bar 77, and a grim old cowman he is, too; but the boss of that spread and the bully of that old man is none other than myself, Molly O'Doon. I'm thinking it's a bully you need over you, too. I'm out for the job. Now, try to get away from me. We met in the rain, and you picked me up. I was about to be caught, and for what fate Heaven only knows, and here you come again! Are you going to slap Destiny in the face? Are you going to try to buck the cards that are stacked against you?"

"The Two Bar 77, did you say?"

"Yes, that's our brand."

"And your cows run east to a big drift fence?"

"And south to the border. Father is the owner of over two hundred sections, all in one piece, and a lot of scattering land. His, Micky, is the largest outfit along the line. We work forty-two boys in the saddle and around the home ranch, and there's plenty work, at all times, for a waddy who wants it. And, what's more, my dad is a power on this border."

"I'll be after staying for supper, anyhow," smiled Micky. "And in the morning I'll borrow a set of plates from your dad and tack these on Barry; his shoes are getting thin."

"Just after you lighted that match, when we were riding away from the railroad, you said something. Do you remember what it was, Micky?"

"Some foolishness spilled out of an empty mind, no doubt. But I remember that match and how it showed me the face of you. Wasn't I after remembering what I seen in that matchlight only a little while ago?"

"You were, and so did I. You said then, Tricky Micky—and you blurted it out as if it was a spoken thought, and the echo of it is with me now—'Sure, you could have me arrested for what I am thinking. The man who invented matches was a wonder.' Translate that, will you?"

"And did I say that now?"

"You did, and it tickled me down to my toes. Do you want to hear what I'm thinking?"

"I warn you, I'm Irish! What is it you have on your mind except that royal purple hat?"

"That if you get away from the Two Bar 77 it will be because I have lost my cunning. There's a lot of Irish sayings, and there's a lot of Irish ways I want to learn from you, Tricky Micky. What you said of Ireland put the hunger in me to know more. And I've learned that you know all the ways of sweeneying a horse; of pouring melted lard in a bronc's ear, to give him the fake jaunders; of painting white hairs with pot-

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ash to make them brown; and a dozen other tricks horse traders use in their cheating trade."

"Ah, Molly, it's hitting me a clout you are. You're showing me a good time out of the big, fine, colleen heart of you. And I'm thanking you for that. They call me Tricky, and I am, after a fashion, with a horse or a rope; but put me in a house and let me ram around furniture, and you'd have it up to the carpenter's for repair in a week. I belong where women ain't, I can tell you that; and that's the most generous thing I could be saying to a slip of a gurrl like you. Who's that waving in the road up ahead of us?"

"Daddy, and he's motioning for me to come on fast!"

She sprang ahead, Barry romping beside her pinto, to stop before a grizzled cowman sitting a horse in the middle of the road.

"Father, this is Micky O'Brien, the man who took me back of him when the wagon didn't show up at uncle's station. I was chased just now by some Sonora greasers and Micky scared them off. He saved me, daddy, and now he says he'll be staying over with us for a rest, and then hurrying on to get out of the way of a shooting scrape he had the other night in Querida. He shot Pietro Ensenada."

"Put here there, son," exclaimed the old man, extending a hand. "Tim O'Doon has been looking for a man like you for many and many a day. And ride no farther, if it's fear of Ensenada's band that is chasing you. You did a good job when you rid the country of him. But did either of you see any moving horses, as you came this way? I've lost a small bunch of right good saddle stock from my north horse ranch."

Micky's mind leaped back to the small corral hidden in the valley just below the Great Horned Owl Pass.

"Was one of them broncs," he asked, "a big, rangy chestnut with a front white stocking and a star in his face?"

"Yes, that's Goldie Boy, and he's worth five hundred, if he's worth a cent. Where did you see him?"

"In a little concealed corral just under that big rim which hems in Looking Glass Sink. I had come across Great Horned Owl Pass, when I seen smoke. Hurrying to that place, I found a dead fire and under the ashes some stamp irons. These were the Pig Pen ZZ."

"What are you saying, Micky? There is no pass over that rim into Looking Glass."

"Don't tell me that, sir, it's me and my Barry what rode down it. It's as slick a pass as ever you see, and cut up with the feet of horses and cows, too. I'm thinking there's something crooked going on in this man's country. Who runs the Pig Pen ZZ, sir?"

"Mop-head Hertzig, my nearest neighbor to the north."

"And what would a man like him be doing hiding his irons in a dead fire? That's what's been troubling me since I found those stamps."

"If you saw Mop-head you'd know him. He's the ugliest, wickedest-looking human you ever saw. Ears like a bat, jowls like a wolf, bleary eyes, and a mop of black, coarse hair which comes to a point directly over his eyes."

"That's the man. He was riding to cross Great Horned Owl Pass the last sight I got of him," exploded Micky, then continued. "I'm thinking, Mr. Tim O'Doon, that a rawhide rope is about all the mother this fellow ever had for any of his broncs or his cows. Has that thought ever occurred to you? I believe he is the magpie who has been making the Two Bar 77 into a first-class Pig Pen ZZ."

"He has been blotting my brand?"

"I'll show you what I mean, when we get to the house."

"But Goldie Boy, what brand did he wear?"

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"The Pig Pen ZZ. If we were to ride back to that corral we could catch them thieves. I'm sure of it. They finished branding, and then rode away. Mop-head went one way, and his boys went the other, hazing a bunch of horses before 'em. They'll come back for the horses they branded and corraled, I'm sure."

"Would you ride to that corral now, Micky?"

"Could I have a fresh horse?"

"Come on to the house. We'll have something to eat, and when the boys come in we'll slap a bunch of them into saddles and ride like blazes for that hide-out."

"Father, let Micky ride Trouble Shooter, he's the nearest thing we own to Big Barry. And when you pick him up have one of the boys get my Lady Lou. I'm riding with you to that corral."

"Miss Molly, that's no kind of a ride for a girl like you, after what you been through to-day," said Micky.

"Micky O'Brien, when you've been around Molly as long as I have you'll know it's fighting a buzz-saw to try to change her mind. Find out what she wants to do, agree with her that this is what should be done, and, presto, she won't do it! But oppose her, and she'll bring about what she wants, no matter how you try to prevent her," laughed Molly's father.

"She has a way with her, Mr. O'Doon. She's Irish, you know."

Molly tossed her head. "Does Tricky Micky, daddy, belong to this spread now?" she asked, naïvely.

"He was put on the pay roll when he rode up to me," said Tim.

"Then Micky," said Molly, "you'll eat in the big house with father and me to-night. I'm riding ahead to see that we get something good to eat. We'll have fried pullet and floating island for supper, which I'll have on the table at six, sharp."

"Boy," said Tim, "I received a letter from my brother-in-law, Channing, yesterday. It has a Marfa clipping in it which might interest you. That case against you has been dropped. Jim Burgis and his father Jud have left Marfa and are now in San Clemente. Here, read this."

Micky read the newspaper clipping.

An aftermath of the shooting of Jim Burgis by Terrence Michael O'Brien in the Two Bills saloon some weeks ago came up to-day. Tom Hearn, who was an old settler and friend of Micky O'Brien's father and was with the elder O'Brien when he was mysteriously killed in Two Bills some years ago, was found dead with a bullet in the middle of his back in his house this morning. He had been killed as he sat reading beside his table, which was before a kitchen window.

The bullet hole through the windowpane shows how the crime was committed.

Public sentiment has at last changed.

Marfa believes Micky O'Brien's father was murdered with his own gun; and that Tom Hearn had evidence in support of this. The People's attorney to-day quashed the warrant which had been issued against Tricky Micky O'Brien and is most anxious to get into communication with this young cowboy, who fled from Marfa the night of the shooting of Jim Burgis. Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas, and Wyoming papers please reprint this news. And if Tricky Micky O'Brien sees this it is hoped he will return and give the authorities whatever evidence he has to bring to justice the killer of his father, who is undoubtedly the slayer of Tom Hearn, also.

Micky lifted his face to that of Tim O'Doon.

"That's tough," he said. "Tom Hearn was my daddy's friend, sir, and I'm sure he was shot because he talked too much."

"What did he know?"

"He saw a hand with a bright-red finger nail jerking away from the gun which killed my dad. Now Mr. O'Doon, the last link connecting that killer with the murder of my father is gone. And there's no reason for me to go back to Marfa. If you don't mind, I'll be throwing-in with you and riding for the Two Bar 77."

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CHAPTER IX.

THE MASKED RIDER.

WHEN the moon sailed high enough, its rays fell slantwise over a hill and settled on the little screen of aspens and black willows which sheltered the small corral. Tim O'Doon, Micky, Molly, and some of the Two Bar 77 boys circled the spot and came upon it from all sides. It was empty.

And outside of it, even by the moonlight, hoofmarks in the earth told of horses which had milled here, traveled there, came in from this direction, went out from that. It was decided that the horses had been "shoved" south. And that meant that these had gone to Mexico. Tim O'Doon was still, grim with a silent grimness, which every man there felt.

"There's that in your mood, Mr. O'Doon," said Micky, "which screams out loud to me. What is it you're thinking?"

"That we'll have war on this grass before very long. Now, Micky, show me those irons you found and hid."

But the irons were not there. By matchlight their imprint could be seen in the soft earth under the bushes; but the irons were gone. Tim O'Doon's breath came in sharp, savage gasps.

"Home!" he ordered. "We'll be getting back and I'll be calling on Mop-head Hertzig. I've a hunch that we're up against a machine. But before we go, Micky, you show these boys the trail that leads up to Great Horned Owl Pass."

With minute description Micky told of the trail, pointed out its twisting position along the moon-swept sides of the ridge, and gave definite instructions about an eroded set of cliffs where the last reaches of the path led to the high, rocky top of the rim. Then they started back, crestfallen, silent, moody. Micky rode besideMolly, who was lost in a deep brooding which passed itself to him.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked. She indicated with a small inclination of her head that she wanted Micky to slow up his horse and allow her father to pass out of earshot. Then she said in a low, swift rush of words.

"We must stop him from seeing Hertzig. He's in a desperate frame of mind."

"I'll tag along with him, Molly, and I'll see that he gets in no jam."

"No, he must not see Mop-head. If he does——"

From up ahead a low, rumbling sound came. The noise was understood by every man in that small group. Tim lifted a hand, halting his companions. Once more came that dull, thumping discord stealing over a long ridge. No mistaking the meaning of this now! Fast-traveling horses were racing along under the crest of that ghostly ridge now bathed in the brilliant light of the moon. Then these came into sight. And what a sight they made!

The foremost animal was a magnificent big black. He was leading a bunch of mares and these were followed by long-legged colts. Then came a press of ponies which traveled the flat top of the ridge in a serpentine line, weaving in and out as it went, like a thing unreal. On the flank of the band were seen several horsemen, their high-crowned, curiously shaped sombreros proclaiming them to be Mexicans.

"What's coming off here, Tim?" asked a cowboy called Baldy. "Them ain't our broncs. Looks like to me, from that big black leading 'em, that Mop-head Hertzig is shoving out his whole string. Hadn't we better dip across this gulch and take a look-see at them greasers?"

"Wait till the drag looms in sight," said Tim. "There'll be the men we want to squint at. Now! Who are those hombres?"

Five riders stood out on the ridge at the rear of the horses like silhouettes viewed through a silver screen, the dust

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following the horses producing this singular effect.

"I can't recognize any of 'em as Mophead's men," said Baldy. "They're strangers to me. Oh, oh, who's that! Gosh!"

Far behind the drag men rode a lone horseman. His hat was gray, his horse was big, long of barrel, trim of leg, golden, in the high moonlight, white of tail and mane, both of which flowed fantastically in the wind, and he moved with a beautiful action as he danced along in a side-stepping fox-trot which would have been recognizable anywhere.

"Goldie Boy!" exclaimed Molly. "Daddy, do you see him?"

"Sssh, Molly," said Tim quietly. "It's the man on his back that's got me. He looks like a ghost. What's that on him?"

"By golly," said Micky, "if he ain't wearing a linen duster!"

"But the reach of him," commented Baldy. "Why, from the saddle up to the tip of his hat it's a good four feet. He's a man!"

"And don't he look like a ghost?" queried a cowboy.

"Wait, Tim O'Doon," exclaimed Baldy. "Do you remember I was telling you of a mysterious rider who's been seen around the country west of San Clemente?"

"Uh-huh. What about it?"

"They calls that fellow The Gray Patrol. I've a feeling we're looking at him, right now. And we'll never get a better chance.

"Come on, boys!" yelled Tim. "And you, Molly, stick here till we get back." Her father was whirling down the trail, the boys after him. Then, when they came out of the cover of the trees, from the middle of the opposite slope, in a spitting burst of fire, a dozen rifles cracked, sending a series of crashing echoes down the gulch. Bullets whined about O'Doon's men and they vanished back into the trees.

"They were laying for us, Tim!" cried Baldy. "That slope is plastered with guns."

"Micky," said Molly, "if we would turn about, run down this rim, and out upon that far point, which juts nearly to that opposite ridge, I've an idea we could get a shot at the men on the drag. Look, Goldie Boy is running forward! That man can't get down on the other side of the ridge, and he must make a run for the trees up ahead. Follow me, Micky!"

They went off at a gallop. And the great horse they were watching easily outdistanced their mounts. But there with an expanse of loose shale on the top of that spur across which the fine big horse had to slacken his gait, Micky and Molly gained, reached the outjutting point, and were dismounting as Goldie Boy galloped up. Micky's carbine flashed in the moonlight.

"Don't, Micky!" Molly cried. "Don't shoot! You might hit Goldie Boy!"

"He's but a stone's throw away, Molly! I couldn't miss the tall skinny barrel of that man if I was blindfolded."

"Micky, look!" cried Molly, and the sound of her voice rang far out across the silence of that canyon. "Look at that rider's face!"

The man on Goldie Boy turned his head; obviously, he was looking at the girl and the boy on that sharp, high point. And his eyes, ghastly large, enormously black, seemed to be set in a face which suggested that of a dead man. Clearly the explanation came to Micky.

"He's wearing a full-face mask, Molly," he said.

"Yes, a gunny sack," said the girl. "I see it flopping about his shoulders. He's stopping Goldie Boy. He's shouting at us!"

"I heard what that girl said. And I'm wondering if you are Tricky Micky O'Brien?" came a clear, mocking cry.

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Molly touched Micky's arm. "Don't answer," she said.

"Well, why don't you talk?"

Molly clutched Micky's arm in a grip more expressive than anything she could have said. Again, across the treetops hurtled the savage mockery of the man on Goldie Boy's back.

"I've graded you, Tricky Micky, by the shape of your build, and the trim of your hat. And my advice to you is to be heading out of this country and sifting a lot of sand between you and this region. Get away, kid, and stay healthy! Linger here and you'll stay a long, long time!"

Goldie Boy sprang forward, and crossing the last of the open top of the ridge vanished among the trees. On rushed the driven horses, the drag closing up fast. Then, when the ponies had been swallowed up in the trees, furtive, darting forms rose along the ridge and using the shadowy slope as a background reached the thicket where horses awaited them. The Two Bar 77 boys stood watching them go, cursing the ill luck of their small number which forbade pursuit.

Micky and Molly rejoined Tim O'Doon, and with him rode back home. When the horses were turned loose, Micky followed Tim into the big house.

"Boy," said Molly's father, "we've been barking up the wrong tree. My hands placed six or seven of those broncs as belonging to Mop-head. I've an idea that Hertzig will be riding this way for me to help him recover his remuda."

"If he does," answered Micky, "I'll be wanting a bit of a talk with him. And when might you be looking for him to dust up to your gate?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if it was in the morning."

"I would, for I saw him go up the twisting trail that leads to Great Horned Owl Pass," retorted Micky. "And what is there to be going that way for, unless it be to Querida over the long ride across the Looking Glass Sink? It's no Mop-head you'll be seeing till his business is done to the east of us. Then why was Goldie Boy burnt with Mop-head's brand? And who came back and hunted for and found the hidden irons?"

"Boy, you talk a bit wild. My brand can't be blotted into Mop-head's without a lot of clever work."

"Says you, Mr. O'Doon. Now will you be after getting me a bit of a pencil and some paper. I'll show you a trick that's as cute as any you ever saw!"

And there, under the glow of the lamp, while Molly leaned at his shoulder, and old Tim looked on chewing a cigar, Micky drew a series of amazing designs.

"Here's your brand, Mr. O'Doon," he said, making the Two Bar 77. "The same iron that burns the horizontal bars of your brand can be twisted around to the perpendicular, and, by golly, you have the Pig Pen. Then with a burn over your old 77 scar, the ZZ appears. Now the only way you'd detect your brand, two weeks after a hide had been singed, would be by the use of skinning knives. Do you see it now? I'm thinking you've been asleep a bit!"

Molly utteed a gasp. Tim dropped into a chair.

"I'm going to San Clemente in the morning," he said. "I want to see the brand inspector."

"I'll be loping along with you," said Micky. "I've a notion San Clemente will be full of excitement for the two of us."

Molly was watching a curious light blazing in Micky's eyes.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Coming Next Week, "CINCHED," by ROY W. HINDS.

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Trailed and Treed!

By Kenneth Gilbert

Author of "Fair Game," etc.

WITH his outfit on the back of the patient little burro, Molasses, rather aptly named because of its leisurely movements, "Uncle Jim" Crockett savagely drew taut a diamond hitch, and paused to shake his fist at the wild, fir-matted peaks of the Olympics frowning about him, their serrated edges notched against the sullen gray sky of late fall.

"I'm through with ye!" the old prospector announced with finality. "Plumb through, hear me? No more winterin' up here, fightin' blizzards and rheumatics, and rustlin' firewood. Never again! Got enough of a stake to let me live like a white man among other white men, instead of holin' up here for another winter like a blamed bear. Jest show me somethin' that'll make ye keep me up here another winter! Show me!"

He glared around as though expecting a response from the peaks, but except for the distant echo of his voice among the crags, there was only silence. Defiantly he waited. The sad-eyed Molasses regarded him curiously yet without surprise, for like most men who have spent a lifetime in the hills, Uncle Jim was accustomed to voicing his thoughts aloud. Molasses twitched an appreciative ear. Suddenly feeling a little foolish at his own outburst, however, Crockett grunted, and went inside the cabin to make certain that he had overlooked nothing, yet to see that there was an ample supply of firewood for the use of some wilderness wayfarer who might seek shelter here when the fierce storms of winter beat about the place.

"Wouldn't be so bad if I had a pardner," he went on. "Like old Pete Simmons. But he's gone." He came outside, still defiant. "You hear me, Molasses?" he addressed the burro. "We're leavin' this place forever. Jest show me somethin' that would keep me here another——"

But he broke off as he discovered that he had another listener besides Molasses. Seated on a horse near by was a swarthy, bearded man, his lips twisted in a derisive smile.

"Still talkin' to yourself, eh, Crockett?" he asked. "No wonder you're pullin' out. Reckon you should have pulled out before this. You've spent too many winters alone!"

Uncle Jim's whiskers bristled in sudden anger.

"What you grinnin' at, Slade?" he demanded. "Anybody ask you for your opinion? If I was twenty year younger, I'd snatch you off that horse, and——"

"And get yourself into a heap of

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trouble!" finished Slade, still grinning. "But I'm right grateful for that cabin. I can use it this winter when I run my trap line through this country!" He shifted his booted feet in the stirrups, for he wore heavy shoes, after the fashion of hillmen. "That is," he added, "if the place doesn't need too much cleanin' out. My guess is that you're no great shakes as a housekeeper, Crockett."

The old man seemed on the verge of exploding, for he had learned long ago that orderliness is one of the essentials of a man who must live alone. He was proud of his neatness.

"I'd rather burn the place down than see you use it!" he flared. "Only you wouldn't dare to. Dave Simmons runs his trap lines in this country. You haven't the nerve to poach on his grounds."

Slade's face darkened.

"Yeah?" he jeered. "Well, Dave Simmons won't be up here for some time. They've got him, dead to rights, for killin' elk for their teeth. By the time he works off a five-hundred-dollar fine, it's goin' to be too late in the spring for trappin'!"

Uncle Jim's jaw sagged, for he saw that Slade was in earnest.

"Dave Simmons kill elk?" he demanded. "Why, that's a blamed lie, Slade! No man in this country besides a skunk like yourself would kill elk for their teeth, you——"

Slade leaned toward him, face black with anger. One hand rested on the butt of the short-barreled carbine in the saddle boot.

"Shut your trap!" he ordered. "Or I'll shut it for you!" For a long moment there was murder in his eyes. Then he straightened in the saddle, swung his horse around, and rode off.

The old man stared after him. There was fear in Uncle Jim's eyes, fear and disbelief. Not fear of Slade, but for the news concerning Dave Simmons. If it was true that Dave was charged with killing elk, then it meant ruin for the young man. And Dave was the son of old Pete Simmons, now dead, who had been the tried-and-true partner of Uncle Jim Crockett for nearly forty years.

Not only ruin for Dave Simmons, but for his family as well. There were Milly and the baby, in the little home that Dave was trying to homestead. For two summers now he had held the job of forest ranger, and the salary had helped mightily, for the Simmonses were desperately poor. He had done his work so well, however, that Hazeltine, the forest supervisor, had promised him a better job, with more money, the following year. Yet if he was convicted of shooting elk, then the job would go glimmering. And the little money Dave could make by trapping during the winter would not be enough to keep his home and family intact. Besides, he had no money now, and would have to serve out his fine, even as Slade had predicted. Milly would be destitute. More than that, from now on Dave would be a marked man, an outlaw.

For just a long moment Uncle Jim Crockett pondered the situation. Then, with a sigh, he unpacked the burro.

"Can't leave here just yet, Molasses," he explained. "Can't run out on the son of my old pardner. Reckon we'll hang on for a few days longer. But, by cracky, I don't aim to stay up in these hills another winter!"

With his outfit once more in the cabin, and Molasses returned to his homelike stall, with a great pile of meadow hay on which to gorge himself at leisure, Uncle Jim Crockett took the down trail to the settlement, his long-barreled .45-90 rifle tucked in the crook of his arm.

They were alone in the jail office, Dave Simmons and Uncle Jim.

"Got you, did they?" demanded

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Crockett with mock severity. Dave Simmons, tall, good-looking, yet with anxiety written on his good-natured face, shook his head.

"You know better, Uncle Jim," he declared. "You know I never killed elk. I've got too much at stake, even if I had the heart to do it. Why, it would be like shooting cows in a pasture!"

Uncle Jim nodded.

"Sure, I know you didn't," he agreed. "But tell me how it happened."

Dave grew even more sober.

"I can't help but think it was a frame-up of some kind," he declared. "I could almost make a guess as to who framed me, and why. But, there's no proof. Finch, the game warden, apparently caught me with the goods.

"It happened yesterday morning. You know, I've been working hard trying to run down the thieves who are stealing government timber on Squaw Creek. Somebody stuck a note under my door, saying that if I'd be on Squaw Creek, near the upper forks, early in the morning, I'd find something interesting. Naturally, I fell for it.

"I went there. I found a few trees had been cut. But I found something else. There were three cow elk, dead. They'd been shot. While I was puzzling over it, wondering who could have done it, Finch stepped out of the brush, and arrested me.

"It was no use to plead that I knew nothing about it. I showed him my rifle, showed him that it hadn't been fired. But he pointed out that the elk had been dead several hours, that the teeth of two of them had been removed. He suggested that I'd killed them the day before, cleaned my gun, and had come back for the third pair of teeth. Of course, he didn't find any elk teeth on me, but he didn't need to; the circumstantial evidence is all against me. All I could find out from him was that he'd had a tip to be on the spot, the same as I had."

Dave paused, and shook his head.

"I'm held under a thousand dollars bail," he went on. "They're sure to convict me! That means the loss of my job—everything. Milly and the baby were here a short time ago. She's brave, but she knows what it means.

"I'm stuck, Uncle Jim! But," and his voice became savage, "when I get out, I'm going to even things up with Slade. He framed me; I know it! He knows that I've been trying to connect him with the theft of that timber. He's taken this means to ruin me, get me out of the way. I—I'll kill him!"

Uncle Jim caught him by the shoulder.

"You'll do nothin' of the kind!" he announced. "You let me hear any more talk like that, and I'll take you over my knee. As for keepin' you in here because you can't put up bail, why, don't you worry about that, son. Ain't you my old pardner's boy? I've got a little dust I've washed out of the creeks this summer, and you're goin' home to your family, right away! Didn't you name that baby boy of yours Jimmy Crockett Simmons? You tell Milly not to worry. And don't you let me hear any more about what you're goin' to do to Slade. I reserve all killin' rights on him myself, if it comes to that!" He sighed. "I was aimin' to go outside this winter," he added. "Plumb fed up on the hills. But I reckon I can stick around a while longer, especially when there's work to do.

"You leave everything to Uncle Jim Crockett! No Crockett ever failed. My great-grandfather was old Davy Crockett hisself. Why, all the wild critters surrendered when he p'inted his gun at 'em! Don't you remember readin' how a raccoon, when he saw Davy Crockett draw a bead on him, jest naturally came right down outta the tree?

"If Davy Crockett could bring down a 'coon that a way, I reckon Uncle Jim Crockett can make a skunk like Slade quit! You mark my words!"

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Yet, as he drifted through the hills, it seemed that Uncle Jim Crockett had no definite plan. No matter how convinced he might be that the tricky Slade was at the bottom of the affair, there was no proof that would stand the test in court. Uncle Jimmy Crockett was getting old, and he would have dearly loved to have spent the cruel winter "outside," as he had planned. Yet there was satisfaction in knowing that for the time being, at least, he had returned Dave Simmons to his family, even though it had taken nearly all the precious store of gold he had accumulated.

"Plague take this country!" Uncle Jim complained, as he trudged on. "I'll clean up this mess somehow, and then I'll get out. 'Tain't likely it'll storm for a few days yet. No more winters in here for me!"

Characteristically, however, he started at the bottom of things. He struck out for the place on upper Squaw Creek where, as Dave Simmons had said, timber was being stolen. The trip consumed nearly all day, and nightfall found the old man there, somewhat disgustedly aware that he would have to make a night camp in the woods, despite the fact that the weather was cold and that he already felt twinges of rheumatism.

"Can't be helped," he declared. "But I'm not goin' to winter up here, that's all!" That determination seemed to buoy him up, and steady him.

It was comparatively easy to locate where the timber thieves had been at work. Spruce had been cut, and floated down Squaw Creek, probably to where that stream emptied into the river, the Ohanepecosh. Unless all signs failed, the timber thieves had completed their job there, and had moved elsewhere, fearing discovery.

By the failing light, the old man examined the ground, the freshly cut stumps. To one who has spent many years in the wild, trail sign tells a plain story. Uncle Jimmy saw many things that interested him. Of one thing, however, he was convinced; that it was a one-man job.

"Slade, all right!" he decided. "But how'm I goin' to get him? Stumps don't prove nothin'."

He marked where the logs had been dumped into the creek. Then, because he was a prospector, he fell to studying the sand bars, possibly forgetting for the moment why he was there, and thinking only that the bars might be productive of gold.

"Likely lookin' ground, at that," he soliloquized. "Wonder why I've never prospected this blamed creek." Although it was darkening rapidly, he got out his well-polished gold pan, and took a few samples. "Not enough light to see a 'color,'" he decided at last. "But I'll take another panful of dirt, and work it over to-morrow."

As he was in the act of scooping up the black sand, he caught sight of a track on the sand bar. Clear and sharp was the imprint of a man's heavy shoe. Despite the failing light, he could make out the details plainly. There was one thing peculiar about the track—in the center of the tiny holes made by the steel calks was a rectangular depression, as though the shoe had been crudely patched.

"Might be Dave's track, or it might belong to Finch," reasoned the old man. He had already located the three dead elk. "And then, again, it might have been made by Slade. Still, that wouldn't prove anything!"

Uncle Jim made camp, and got himself a hasty meal. As he crawled into his sleeping bag, he heard from afar the bugling of an elk bull, deep and sonorous and not unmusical.

"That would be old Mowitch himself," Crockett reflected. In the Olympics was one giant bull, bigger than the others, and at this season highly truculent. For it was the love moon of the

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antlered clan, when the deer, the elk, and the moose seem to go mad. "Reckon he's callin' for those cow elk that are dead. I'd hate to have the old cuss come on me all of a sudden!"

But Uncle Jim dropped off to sleep then, and although he awoke several times during the night to replenish the fire, for the air was bitter chill, he saw or heard nothing more of the big herd-master of the elk band. Daylight found Crockett under way.

He was headed downstream this time, playing a hunch. Reasoning it out, if Slade was the timber thief, he could not have taken the logs very far, for he had been at Crockett's cabin the previous day. Slade might be taking things easy until Dave Simmons was safely put away. Through clumps of devil club and vine maple, battling with salal thickets, old Uncle Jim made his way. Now and then he heard the call of a bull elk. Time was when their bawling could have been heard on every hand, but the teeth hunters had made heavy inroads in the herd. Old Mowitch himself, of whose fighting qualities and prowess there were many stories, was ruler now of a widely scattered host. Before long, the bass thunder of the great bull would no longer be heard. For that matter, Uncle Jim Crockett was getting on.

"But I'm not through yet, not so long as a skunk like Slade can put one over on the likes of Dave Simmons!" the old man vowed. Yet the gait at which he was driving himself was telling on him. It was shortly after noon that the thing happened which brought him to the sharp realization that he was taking chances too great for comfort.

He was nearly at the point where Squaw Creek empties into the Ohanepecosh, when he came to a wide marsh. To get around it would necessitate a two-mile trip; but if he could cross Squaw Creek, he would avoid it, for the marsh was wholly on one side of the stream. A fallen tree across the creek offered a natural bridge.

Boldly Crockett went across, even though his shoes were not shod with steel calks. Below him the stream flowed deep and swift past the marsh which it flooded during the freshet season. Halfway across, a piece of rotted bark slipped under his right foot, and before he could regain his balance he was plunged into the icy water.

Handicapped as he was by his rifle and pack, Uncle Jim knew that he was close to death. Quickly he wriggled loose from the pack, as he came to the surface. Buoyant as the thing was, it kept him afloat while he gasped with the chill and shook the water out of his eyes. He could let go of pack and rifle, and make shore, but the idea of losing the faithful .45-90 was not to be considered except as a last resort. Besides, the pack was precious, and if he ever got out he would be grateful for the dry clothes inside its waterproof folds. Jamming the barrel of the rifle fast through the pack strap, he shoved the pack ahead of him, and struck out for shore.

But even as he acted, the current was hurrying him along. He had already passed the marsh. Just ahead there loomed a narrow-walled canyon through which Squaw Creek roared vengefully.

"Never goin' to make it!" Uncle Jim kept telling himself, at the same time stroking with all his strength. The current gripped him fast, hurried him on, while the roaring of the creek in the canyon increased in volume. Suddenly, rage seized him, for he realized that if he drowned, Dave Simmons wouldn't stand a chance. "I can't sink! Can't ——" And then, abruptly, he was in the canyon.

He felt himself caught up as though by a mighty hand, and buffeted this way and that. No chance to swim now. He could only hang onto the buoyant pack, and pray that he would not be slammed

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against one of the rocks ambushed there in the flood.

An overhanging tree, known by rivermen as a "sweeper," almost knocked him senseless as he collided with it. But with presence of mind he did not relax his grip on the pack. Round and round he went, hurled almost out of the water at times, and again caught in the maw of a whirlpool. And then, as suddenly as it had started, he felt himself revolving slowly in a great eddy.

Uncle Jim opened his eyes, to see the bank very near. Although dazed by the hammering he had received, he nevertheless managed to muster enough strength to paddle the few strokes necessary to reach the shore, and there he dragged himself out on what appeared to be a log jam in the eddy.

For a few moments he lay there with closed eyes; then a chill shook him, and he scrambled to his feet. Hurriedly he gathered wood, and got a fire going. When the flames were roaring upward, he stripped off his clothes, and changed to the dry garments in the pack. Baking in the grateful warmth, Uncle Jim reflected that he had come through very luckily. He had saved his pack, his rifle —and his life.

"Plague take such a country!" he declared. "I'm gettin' out of it before winter comes, although I've got to straighten things out for Dave Simmons first. But I'll have to hurry; there's a storm comin'."

Now, for the first time, Uncle Jim took stock of his surroundings. He gave an exclamation of surprise when he discovered that the log jam out of which he had crawled was nothing more than a stoutly secured raft of freshly cut spruce.

His eyes widened at realization of what it meant.

"It's the stolen timber!" he exclaimed. "Rafted it down Squaw Creek, and hid it in this eddy, until time comes to send it down the Ohanepecosh. Well, well! Me, I got somethin' more out of that little swim than a cold duckin'!"

Then, in the sand, he saw a track. The same sharp and clear imprint of the shoe. And in the center of the right foot was that blank spot, as though the steel calks were missing.

Uncle Jim nodded understandingly.

"That's the track of the feller who was up there on the bar where those elk was killed," he decided. "The same feller who stole the spruce shot the elk. Now, all I got to do is to find if it's Slade's right shoe that has missin' calks!"

He piled more wood on the fire, for he needed heat. Then he got out a little grub and ate it. As he did so, he heard once more the distant challenge of a bull elk. And, a moment later there came, faintly, two reports of a rifle!

Uncle Jim looked grim, as he put down his grub, and picked up his own gun. The elk killer was at work again. Half-opening the breech of the gun, he made certain that there was a cartridge in the barrel. Then, his hardships forgotten, he struck out swiftly in the direction whence the rifle shots had come.

The killer could not be far; less than a mile, Uncle Jim guessed. But it would require quick work to get there before the killer had finished the grim business of removing the teeth of his victim. Crockett hurried faster, but he had not gone more than a hundred yards when he heard another shot, then, indistinctly, what sounded like a yell of terror.

Hard on the heels of that, he heard a deep-lunged bellow. Old Mowitch! Surely there was not another elk bull in all the wild Olympics with a voice so sonorous and majestic as that.

And Uncle Jim Crockett, despite his age, redoubled his speed. For, old woodsman that he was, he instantly di-

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vined what had taken place. But it was not until he had broken through the last thicket, and saw the dramatic scene before him, that he dared to hope it could actually be true. What he saw was the spectacle of poetic justice brought home with a vengeance.

In the limbs of a medium-sized spruce tree was a man. Slade! On the ground to the left of him was the body of a freshly killed elk cow. And, raging beneath the tree, was the giant herd master, determined to get at the human creature who slew elk so ruthlessly.

But if Uncle Jim Crockett's first impulse was to whoop with joy, he was given no such opportunity. Mowitch, winding him, whirled and charged blindly, but the old man dodged swiftly first behind one tree, then to another. Even then, Mowitch would have caught him had not Slade thought there was a chance of escape.

Slade had dropped halfway down the tree when Mowitch saw him, and came at him in a furious rush. A little breathlessly, but safe in a near-by windfall, Crockett chuckled outright.

In his mind he could reconstruct what had happened. Doubtless, old Mowitch was coming to a tryst with the elk cow, when Slade had appeared, and killed her. The huge herd master, already mad with fighting rage, had gone crazy when he saw the man, and had charged. Just in time, Slade had reached the tree, but without his gun, for it stood against a log where he had placed it preparatory to removing the teeth from the slain cow.

Blaring hate and defiance, Mowitch sought to get into the tree where Slade perched. Suddenly, he smelled the gun, and charged it, beating it into the ground. The tremendous blows of his heavy hoofs accidentally exploded the weapon, and he jumped back, frightened. But the next moment he had splintered it into fragments, then, as though fearful that Slade might escape, he came rapidly charging back to the tree.

"Why don't you kill him, you old duffer?" raged Slade at Crockett. "He'll keep us here all night!" Slade saw that Crockett still was armed.

Uncle Jimmy chuckled again.

"Won't keep me, Slade," he replied. "But I'll bet that he keeps you—and I hope it's for a week. You blamed skunk! If I had my way, providin' there wasn't more at stake than just this, I'd start shootin' you out of that tree, so that he could get at you. Old Mowitch is entitled to his revenge for all the elk you've killed!"

Slade started to reply scorchingly when he saw Uncle Jim get down off the windfall.

"Hey!" cried the outlaw in a panic. "Where you goin'? You ain't figurin' on leavin' me here with this wild beast!"

"Just that," replied Crockett. "I've got the goods on you, Slade, and all I need is that game warden, Finch, for a witness. I'm goin' after Finch——"

"Don't need to, Crockett!" came a voice from the opposite side of the clearing. "I heard this shooting while passing along the trail over there. Reckon I dropped in just in time!" And the game warden stepped out into the open.

But the next instant he was tearing for a tree, as old Mowitch charged him. He gained the first limb and swung clear, as the giant elk passed beneath. Once there, although white-faced by the nearness of his escape, he pulled out his revolver and fired twice past the bull's head.

But the shots only served to stir Mowitch to new frenzy. He was insane and would not stop short of murder.

"Guess I'll have to kill him," decided the game warden. "It's the only way. Still, it's a shame!"

He lifted the pistol again, this time with deadly intent.

"Hey!" cried Crockett. "I'll show you a better way. Tried it myself once

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when treed by a bull elk!" Carefully placing his gun in the depths of the windfall, he stepped out into plain view of Mowitch, and yelled.

Instantly, the bull wheeled and came at him. But Crockett had already selected a tree, and now scrambled to safety. Once up there, while the bull bellowed beneath, he took out his tobacco pouch, and powdered a small quantity of the weed. Then, as the big elk stood on his hind legs, pawing with forehoofs at the tree, Crockett dusted the tobacco powder into the distended, reddened nostrils.

The effect was instantaneous. The would-be killer sneezed mightily, and broke into a fit of coughing as the tobacco stung and blinded him. Pawing at his nose, he became panicky, and started to run, but collided with a tree. This further frightened him, and he wheeled and dashed madly away, all fight gone out of him.

"And that'll hold him for a while," announced the old prospector, descending the tree. "You've got the real elk-killer in Slade, Mr. Game Warden. Reckon you'll believe Davy Simmons's story now!"

Finch nodded.

"I rather believed it from the beginning," he declared. "Still, the circumstantial evidence against him was strong. But this clears it all up now. Slade is the man I want, and I've got——"

"Hey!" cried old Crockett suddenly, as Slade, scowling, began to descend the tree. "Stay right there a second!"

Wondering, Slade obeyed. He was seated just above the two men, his feet hanging down, ready to jump to the ground. But Crockett was pointing excitedly to the sole of Slade's right shoe.

"See that?" he demanded of Finch. The latter nodded.

"It's a fresh spruce chip stuck on the calks of his boot," said the game warden. "What about that?"

"Why, just this," replied Uncle Jim Crockett. "I'll prove that Slade was at the place where those elk was killed, and that he also hid a raft of stolen spruce logs in a bend of Squaw Creek!"

Then he jumped, as the frightened Slade stripped off the telltale chip and hurled it from him. But the old man retrieved it happily, like a setter, and held it up again for Finch's inspection.

"Come on!" he urged. "I'll help you take him in, and we'll not only hang elk-killin' on him, but log-stealin' as well!" He chuckled again. "And I got him without firing a shot, jest like old Davy Crockett hisself!"

Hours afterward, when Dave Simmons, cleared of all suspicion, was freed and returned to the bosom of his family, old Uncle Jim Crockett huddled before the fire, nursing what he termed "a man-sized case of rheumaticks." About his cabin howled the first blizzard of the season, strong and lusty, and giving evidence of lasting for days. Molasses, the mule, munching contentedly in his stall, heard the storm with only mild interest. But Crockett shook his head gloomily.

"This storm'll close the passes tight until spring," he declared. "I'm stuck here for another winter, plague take it! Still, it's worth it—knowin' what it means to Dave Simmons and his family. Old Pete was my pard.

"But it's the last winter I'll spend in these blamed hills. Ain't foolin', either!"

Another laugh is in store for you. If you don't believe it, read "DOWN AND ALSO OUT," by ROLAND KREBS, in Next Week's Issue.

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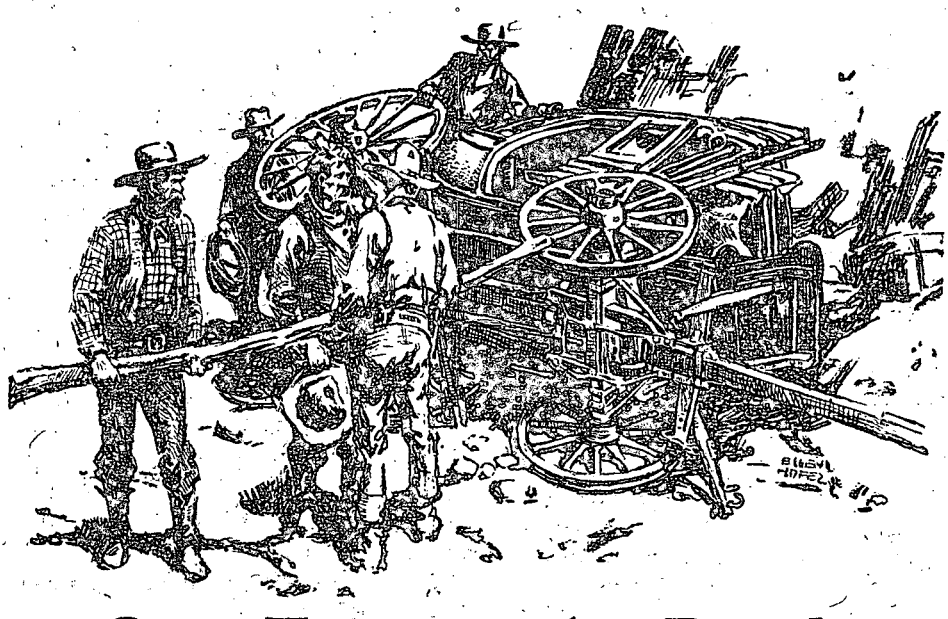

On Fortune's Back

By George Owen Baxter

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

TO obtain money to marry Kate Oliver, the famous Barry Lynmouth publicly "takes water" from Jay Cress. But Kate rejects him, and he is branded as a coward. Embittered, Barry gives the money to charity and feels himself friendless. Cress wants to marry Cherry Daniels. Her brother Lew forces Barry to fight, but, being beaten, his contempt turns to hero worship, which Cherry shares. Her other brother, Tom, vows to ride with the now-outlawed Barry. Cress hires four gunmen to "protect" him from Lynmouth. The stagecoach to Paradise, carrying much gold and many travelers, is held up, but an invalid passenger cleverly cripples the two holdup men and rides away. One bandit, Turk Henley, refuses to disclose who told him about the gold shipment, but adds that his informant neglected to say that Lynmouth was a passenger on the stage.

(BACK NUMBERS ARE EASILY PROCURED.)

CHAPTER XXX.

TURK HENLEY TALKS.

WITH a stout young pole of a sapling as a lever, the men rocked the overturned stage back upon its wheels, and found that its tough hickory had stood the strain wonderfully well. There was only a little splintered wood.

They decided to return to Crooked Horn. In Paradise there was a doctor, but not a jail, and both were absolute requirements for Sid Walsh and Turk Henley. Besides, if one set of rascals knew about the shipment of gold coin, others might know also, and a second attempt might very well be made. So they turned the cumbersome vehicle by hand, hitched on the horses, and went back to Crooked Horn.

It was the longest trip that most of the passengers ever had taken, except for Kate Oliver. Chet and Dick, on the driver's seat, were hungry to spread

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the tidings of the holdup among the townsmen. Desmond Reardon was desperately anxious to learn where he and the outlaw stood in the judgment of Kate. The banker feverishly turned and returned his thoughts as he pondered the uncertain future which might be extending before his daughter.

Finally he said softly to her:

"Kate, did you know from the first that that fellow was Barry Lynmouth?"

She shook her head.

"Did you know before Henley told us?"

"I knew," she said, "the instant that he caught me up and threw me safely clear of the stage." She looked firmly at her father. "I would have been caught under the stage when it fell," she pointed out, "except for what he did."

"Yes," admitted Oliver, who always tried to be fair. "I forgot about you and jumped. I wish to Heaven that girl would be still!"

But Lou Thomas could not be still. She hoped that the accident would not give her a nervous breakdown. She hoped that the robbers would be hanged. She hoped that Barry Lynmouth would receive a pension from the government. It appeared that she always had liked Barry. She had an innate respect for him. Something told her that he never had done the things of which he was accused by brutes and fools. For her own part, she felt that he was a great man, a good man, and, of course, a startling hero!

This chatter hardly ended all the way to Crooked Horn.

Oliver opened a running fire of questions upon the two captured robbers.

"You might tell us if all the recent jobs have been your work," said he.

"Why should we tell you?" snarled Sid Walsh.

"Shut up, Sid," said Turk Henley. "Don't be a fool. Mr. Oliver will see that we get a square deal, maybe."

"We'll never get a square deal. We're framed!" said Sid Walsh.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Oliver," said Turk, who lay couched in sacks and blankets at the bottom of the stage, suffering misery with every jolt and jar over that mountain road. "I'll tell you. No two men could have done all the things that have been laid to Daniels and Lynmouth lately."

"What's your proof of that, Turk?"

"There was the Jackson Ford job, a couple or three days ago. That same night, Flank Thomas was stuck up by another pair of riders at Wolf-eye. How could the same pair've rode fifty miles in four hours?"

"That's been done, I believe, a good many times."

"Sure it has. But mostly in books. No, sir, there's more'n one couple've been livin' on the danger and trouble that Lynmouth has fell into!"

"And how long have you been on the road this way, the pair of you?"

"You wanta know that?"

"Yes, that's what I'm asking."

"To-day is our first day."

"Do you expect me to believe that, Turk?"

"No," answered the wounded man with his surprising way, "I don't expect you to, of course. You'd be a fool if you did."

"I'm afraid," said Oliver, "that you're coming to a hard end, because of this affair, Henley."

"Sure I am," nodded Turk Henley. "Aw, I know that."

"So help me gosh," Sid Walsh suddenly screamed, "every word that Turk is sayin' is the truth!"

"Shut up, shut up!" exclaimed Turk Henley. "Maybe you think that he'll believe you when he won't believe me?"

"Most of these crimes around here will be put on your shoulders, Henley," said the banker, curiously probing the mind of the wounded robber.

"Yeah, I know that," said Henley.

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"I know that they'll hang us pretty pronto. And we don't deserve no better—playin' the skunk and tryin' to live on another man's hard luck. Lynmouth's, I mean!"

The banker suddenly looked up and found the calm eye of his daughter upon him. He could not help flushing a little, and looked hastily back to Henley.

"How many of these recent crimes do you attribute to Barry Lynmouth?" asked Oliver bluntly.

He was irritated by the quiet triumph in the eye of his daughter Kate.

"Not one," came the amazing response of Turk Henley.

"What?" exclaimed Oliver. "You're going to let him and Daniels off from everything?"

"I can't help it. You'll see through it yourself, in another minute or two, I reckon."

"See through what?"

"This case of poor Lynmouth. Lookit what he done to-day."

Oliver hesitated, but he was a just man, and had to give credit where it was due.

"I hope," he said slowly, "that Lynmouth was not on this stage for the same purpose of robbery that put the two of you in ambush there at the curve of the road. I hope that he did not have his own plans spoiled by the appearance of you two!"

"You hope that, do you?" asked Henley, with a faint sneer. "Well, maybe you'll tell me what would've kept him back. He dropped the pair of us—*whang, bang!* Then he turns around and sees the rest of you gents spilled out in the brush like Mexican laundry. What would've stopped him from linin' you up and shooting out the eyeteeth of them that looked crooked or tried to pull a gun? He had the chance, and he had the time. Or maybe you don't think that he can shoot straight enough?"

He showed his teeth as he smiled at his own last remark.

"Yes," confessed Oliver. "He can shoot straight enough. He's brave enough—but to let him off scot-free for all the other crimes which have been attributed to him around here——"

"You wouldn't do that?" asked Henley, the same faintly critical sneer reappearing on his lips.

"I wish to be fair," muttered the banker.

But he began to doubt his own fairness for the first time. Frankly, he was enormously afraid of Barry Lynmouth for the sake of Kate.

"Whatcha think?" said Henley, who in this argument seemed to forget his own pain to some degree. "Whatcha think put Lynmouth in this here stage?"

Oliver bit his lips and glanced aside sharply at his daughter. Her head was high. Her hands lay loosely folded in her lap. Her smile was directed calmly to the far-off mountains. For the first time in many days he saw again in her face the mysterious and beautiful aloofness which always had baffled him and troubled him with wonder. Lynmouth was in her mind, he knew; and she was content again.

"I don't exactly know," said the banker.

"Why," said the robber, "he was tired of having every murder and stickup job laid to him and young Daniels. He couldn't write to a paper and deny that he'd done the work. He just come down and got wind of this frame and stepped in and busted it up. He broke the window, but it looks like you won't let in the light and air. Besides, Mr. Oliver," he added in a slightly lower voice, "would he have any reason to want to save you twenty thousand dollars—and other trouble?"

He glanced quickly at Kate as he said this.

Oliver's face pinched with pain. "I don't know," he said honestly. "You

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would give Lynmouth a clean bill of health, Henley?"

"Yeah. I would."

"And Daniels?"

"I dunno. Tom went with Barry Lynmouth to help, if he could, I suppose; and ever since then, I take it that Barry has been tryin' to keep the kid out of trouble and with clean hands."

"Have you any reason for being so easy with Barry Lynmouth?" asked Oliver suddenly.

The other looked down to his bandaged legs.

"That could've just as well been through the head instead of the legs," he answered.

This, for some reason, made Oliver silent. He returned on a different track.

"You managed that holdup to roll the stage over the edge of the cliff, Henley," he accused.

"Yeah. It looks that way. I told the kid, here, that it was likely to be a bad place. But he figgered that with the stage goin' down hill and takin' a sudden swing, like that, nobody would be ready for trouble. He was right. But——"

He cast a sour glance at Sid Walsh, and the latter turned a ghastly white. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"Mind you," said Henley hastily, "I ain't crawlin' out from under. I'll stand what's comin' my way!"

The banker began to ponder these things slowly, deliberately.

"Do you believe what Turk Henley is saying?" asked the quiet voice of Kate.

William Oliver started. "I don't know," said he.

"Do you believe every solitary syllable that he's said?" she repeated.

Her father stared at her. There was a sort of cold and impersonal inquiry in her eyes that made him understand he himself was now on trial, and for something dearer to him than life. He looked inward.

"Yes," he replied all at once. "I believe everything that has been said by Henley. Every word of it!"

"And so do I," said the girl.

"And so do I!" said Desmond Reardon unexpectedly. His brow was knitted. It seemed apparent that he knew what a sacrifice he was making.

Oliver turned again to Henley.

"If I have the slightest influence in Crooked Horn, I'm going to try to get you a square deal," said he.

He hardly heard the thanks of Turk Henley. He felt that a battle had been fought and won against him, but he could not tell whether to be glad or sad. Bewilderment seized on his mind.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FOUR MEN WAITING.

BUT Mr. "Ford," alias Barry Lynmouth, did not make a rapid trip across country. He merely sprinted on the captured mare while he was putting the first distance between him and the stage. Then he went on more slowly, and journeyed at an easy pace to the point where he had cached Fortune.

Taking Henley's horse to the nearest highway, he turned it loose, and saw it trot away on the road toward Crooked Horn as though it knew the right direction home. Then he went off to the nearest good camping ground among the trees and spent a comfortable-enough night.

After that, he took the way back to the mountains, and he came onto the trail to the house of old Link Jarvis in the dusk of the day, having purposely delayed until that time. He dared not take chances now, even at such an out-of-the-way place as the shack of the eccentric old trapper.

It was exactly the right moment for maneuvering and cautious approaches,

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for the light of the day was dying, and the strength of the moon, hanging low in the east, did not yet begin to tell. Yet, dim as the light was, his keen eyes suddenly showed him an outline among the trees to the right of the trail.

He reined back instantly and jerked a gun in time to cover the form of a rider as the latter came out into the open—a small rider, on a small, nervously active horse.

"Barry?" called the voice of Cherry Daniels.

He slid his gun out of sight and rode up to her and took her gloved, small hand in his. There was light enough, when he was very close, to see that her cheeks and eyes were brilliant.

"You're a long way out, Cherry," he told her. "What's brought you here?"

"Squirrels," said the girl. "I've been out hunting for them all day. You know how it is. You pick a squirrel, and then you see another better one farther along. I just happened to wander up here, and along comes Barry Lynmouth. How are you, Barry?"

"I'm just between night and day, Cherry," he answered her. "Have you come to see Tom?"

"No," she said.

He pretended not to hear her.

"We'll go up the trail to the house," said he. "Old Link Jarvis and his wife will set you up a snack, Cherry. I know that you're hungry."

"I am," she said, "but I won't eat at the Jarvis house."

"Why not?"

"For the same reason that you won't."

"What's up your sleeve?"

"More than you'd guess. A sheriff and nine or a dozen man hunters with their tongues hangin' out for Barry Lynmouth."

He caught her by the arm.

"Do you mean that they've got to Tom?"

"Yeah," she nodded. "They've got Tom."

Barry groaned, throwing back his head in an excess of grief and despair.

"They've got Tom! They've got him while I was out fixing my own affairs!" he exclaimed.

"Listen," said the girl, "everything that goes wrong in the world ain't your fault, is it?"

He groaned again. "It makes me dizzy, Cherry. How could they have found him?"

"It was old man Chick Anthony," she answered with wonderful cheerfulness. "He had an idea about you crossing the mountains and not showing up any farther down from them. He had an idea that you were cached away in some hiding place. So he comes up and tries Link's, and there he finds that the big cat's out hunting, and the little one is left home, mighty sick."

"I'll get him away again," Barry said through his teeth. "I'll have him back, Cherry. Wait here while I——"

It was she who caught his arm this time.

"I think you would," said the girl. "I think that you'd go up there single-handed and see what you could do. But it's no good, Barry. He's not there."

"D'you mean to say," he exclaimed, grinding his teeth, "that they've carted him off, sick as he is?"

"He's not so mighty sick. He's a lot better," said the girl, "and he's down in the jail in Crooked Horn. He got there about two hours after the Paradise stage pulled out the other morning. They slipped him into town and into the jail mighty quiet, with a mask over his face, and all. They hope that nobody knows. But I got a whisper."

"So you came here for me, and you're right, Cherry. But you wouldn't have to ask me to help him. No asking would make me do more than I'm ready to do right now."

"I didn't come here to ask you to help

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him," she answered. "I came to tell you that Link Jarvis's house is a trap that's set and poisoned for you. Those fellows up there don't know about the Paradise stage, yet; and maybe they wouldn't care so much, even if they did know."

"What has the Paradise stage to do with this?" he asked her. "Except that it took me away from the place where I should have stayed to guard poor Tom!"

"Yeah," she agreed. "It wasn't much of a job. Just the shootin' of a pair of crooks, and the savin' of twenty thousand bucks, and a few lives besides, likely—of course that ain't much of a job for a fellow like you, Barry. But other people are makin' quite a talk about it."

"Tom!" said he. "I want to know about Tom. How is he now? What are they going to do about him?"

"I don't know," said the girl. "I wasn't there in town long after the stage pulled up in coming back down the Paradise road. Tom is well enough, I think. His fever is down. He's only a little weak. They won't do anything to Tom."

Then she pointed down the trail.

"We'd better get out of here, Barry. I've scouted the house, and they've planted men all around it. They've got old Link Jarvis tied up, and they've even gagged him, because he wouldn't stop swearin' and shoutin' at them. Link, he says that if they harm a hair of your head, he'll slaughter them all. You have a way of making people love you, Barry."

"I won't budge," said Lynmouth, "till you tell me the truth about Tom. You're certainly trying to cover something up."

"What difference does it make?" said the girl. "You've done what you could for him. I know that. But you can't help him now!"

"Do you think so?"

"I mean, he'll get out of the jail in a while. They won't do anything to Tom——"

"Cherry," said Lynmouth, "turn up your face."

"I won't. Why should I?"

She tried to rein back her horse, but he caught her firmly, and tilted her face, his hand beneath her chin.

"You're crying about Tom!" said he.

"I'm not," said the girl.

"Then what's wrong?"

"I'm a little nervous—I'm sort of tired—I don't know why."

"Cherry, it's about Tom. Tell me what's happened!"

"Why, there's nothing about Tom. I've simply come up here to tell you to leave the country. It's too hot for you here, Barry. You never can make good again. There's too much just blind hatin' where you're named. Even after the news of the Paradise stage come in, and every one began to buzz and talk, only about half were for you, and half were against, and the half who are against include the fightin' men. Barry, you've got to leave. Trek back over the mountains and never turn your face this way again!"

He hesitated. There was an apparent truth in all that she said. He felt that he had been fighting a losing battle for a long time, and that the best way now might be a new scene, a new name, and then perhaps a new hope in life. He looked toward the mountains.

The rose of the sunset was quite gone, and the pure cold light of the moon grew every moment upon the topmost snows.

"I can't go," said he to himself, and yet aloud.

He turned back to the girl.

"You must go!" said she.

"I want the truth about Tom."

"I tell you, no matter what the truth is, you couldn't help him."

Her voice rose high, then broke in a faint wail.

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"What is the truth? Or do I have to go clear to Crooked Horn to find out?"

She stammered at him suddenly:

"I should have known that I couldn't handle you. But this is the truth. The Jarvis shack is one trap for you. The Crooked Horn jail is the other!"

"A trap?"

"They've fair lined it with fighting men—and Jay Cress!"

Lynmouth sighed a little. "I have to meet Jay Cress," he said slowly. "Why not there?"

"Because he's not alone! Because he's not alone! It's a hopeless thing. Don't you see? Tom is only the bait. They're holding him there in the hope that you'll come in and try to rescue him! It isn't Jay Cress alone. He has four others!"

"What four?" Barry asked tersely.

"You could easily name them," said Cherry.

"No. I haven't heard. Has he hired four men to take care of him?"

"I don't know why he has them—except that they're to help him against you. That's pretty clear! They sit there, waiting, like five watchdogs. They know that you'll try anything, and the more impossible it is, the more sure you are to try. The Paradise stage showed that!"

"Well," Barry said, "I'd like to hear the names of the four."

"You can name them. Who are the worst, hardest, cruelest set that you know about?"

"Why, there's no set. I'd put Happy Joe and that cat, Harrison Riley, somewhere near the top of the list."

"You've named two of them! Now try again!"

"Are they both there?" exclaimed Barry, with a start. "Not both Joe and Riley?"

"Yes, both. Now try some more!"

"Who else? There's that brute with the face of a bear. That one-legged murderer, Peg Leg Sam Dean. I never saw a worse face, and I never met a worse man."

"He's the third."

Lynmouth sighed.

"Who else, Barry?"

"I don't know a fourth to go with them."

"What about little Jud Ogden?"

"Aye," said Lynmouth. "I forgot that blood-thirsty ferret of a man. Not all four of them, Cherry!"

"Yes. All four! You see that it's helpless?"

CHAPTER XXXII.

JUDGE BORE SPEAKS HIS MIND.

WHEN William Oliver returned to Crooked Horn on that eventful stage ride, the first thing that he learned, after the astonishment attendant on the arrival of the party had died down, was that Tom Daniels was in the jail, and that Mr. Jay Cress had been asked to help protect the prisoner from the rescue which, as all men were willing to swear, Barry Lynmouth was sure to attempt.

Crooked Horn rarely took itself seriously as a political unit, but now a meeting was called by Rancher Bore, who was also Judge Bore.

The judge was one of the best men in the world. He was the best neighbor, the truest friend, the most cheerful companion, the bravest fighter, the most faithful husband, the most devoted father. He ran his ranch with liberality, and yet with success. He had every Western virtue of uttermost hospitality; and it was said that Judge Bore would go ten miles to pat a sick dog on the head.

But he had two weaknesses. One was for the law. One was for speechmaking.

Whether he stretched himself on his legs and looked down his nose at a long Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner table; or whether he stood on a platform

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beside a table on which to rest his hand and a pitcher of water; or sat behind his official and judicial desk, with an ear wisely canted, listening to testimony, and ready to pronounce sentence, Mr. Bore dearly loved to hear the sound of his own voice whenever the occasion rose.

If the occasion did not rise, he was apt to help it to its feet. As for the law, he knew that his understanding of it was limited, but he was always able to make up his mind before the testimony was so much as opened in the court, so that it hardy mattered to him what was said by the witnesses or the opposing attorneys. To these peope he maintained an attitude as polite as possible, but it was plain that he saw through everything to the heart, and in all his career, there never had been a jury which had disobeyed his orders. Instructions they could not be called.

This day was important for several reasons.

In the first place, Tom Daniels had been brought in a captive by several of Sheriff Anthony's deputies.

In the second place, the Paradise stage had returned, literally dripping with red.

In the third place, the judge felt his very heart yearning toward a speech.

A speech came upon him as a poem comes upon the poet, rather as a swelling of the heart and a lighting of the mind that as an actual idea. He felt the emotion before he saw the words, but old experience taught him that the words would not fail to come. Therefore, he called a meeting.

The children were happily turned out of the schoolhouse, and the greater part of the population of Crooked Horn was turned in. They sat at the little desks with cramped knees, and with stern faces, and with hearts ready to be entertained. There were more than the room was able to seat. The men got up and said:

"Here you are, Mrs. Smith. I done enough sittin' already to last me a lifetime." Or, "Hullo, Minnie. C'mon and sit down here. I wanta stretch."

The ladies were seated. In Crooked Horn, they took a large share in the public life. It was a sign that the town was progressive.

Of course, Judge Bore was presiding at the teacher's desk. And he felt as much at home as though he were in his own dining room or courtroom. Joy swelled in him. But he forced himself to be grave. His pleasure showed itself in those kind smiles which made people love him, as he looked from one friendly face to another.

Everything began with a speech. Bore, of course, made it. He began on a minor note:

"My dear fellow citizens, or let me put it more directly—my dear neighbors and my dear friends, for friends and neighbors we all are, two important events have caused this meeting to be called."

He drew his breath. Then he lowered his voice, an effect which he loved to produce, saying:

"My dear friends, scoundrels have dishonored Crooked Horn, robbed her citizens, blocked her roads, broken her jails, and murdered her men. Only one of them has been captured. One of them is still at large!"

He said this with such a soft impressiveness that some of the ladies looked apprehensively over their shoulders toward the open windows, hoping that the dangerous open air would not hear these things. The men forgot the cramps in their knees. They leaned forward and set their teeth. They would show the scoundrels! Only—who were they?

"I refer," said Judge Bore, "to the highwayman and thief, the cheat and traitor, the robber and man slayer, Barry Lynmouth!"

People drew in their breaths.

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The judge went on, feeling them all in the hollow of his hand:

"The brave man when it comes to weaklings and children, the coward when he meets his match!"

As he said this, he rose from his chair and pointed.

All heads turned. There was a flash of white and a glitter of eyes toward a place where a small, pale man leaned against the wall.

It was Jay Cress!

There was a murmur of interest and applause.

Jay Cress looked down and cleared his throat. He was embarrassed. Some people swore that he blushed, but this was an exaggeration. But they all looked at him with an affectionate familiarity and fondness, somewhat as freshmen look upon their college hero who won the big game of last year with a ninety-yard run in the last ten seconds of the play. To be merely in the room with him was enough.

The ladies had tears in their eyes, for ladies love men who are slightly wicked, or even more than slightly. And Jay Cress was a gambler! It was said that fortunes had passed through his hands. Nerves of steel, unperturbed as millions flowed and ebbed on the gaming table! They thought of him, too, as a matter of course, as the great hero, standing small but terrible before that formidable name and face—Barry Lynmouth.

In this manner that group looked upon the gambler, and well the gambler knew it. But he was able to bow his head, and not call up a blush. Fame had ceased to be an ambition to him. It had become a necessity, like his daily bread.

When Judge Bore saw that he had made a crashing point, he went on with the main thread of his speech. That is to say, he went on with the main current of his words, for a connected thread rarely appeared in his discourses. It was true that he had a certain number of "whereases," but the "therefores" usually did not appear.

He said that the time had come when Crooked Horn was no longer to be disgraced among the cities of the fair West. He said something about the noble eagle spreading its wings in the sunset of something or other, and the terrible song of her battle cry shrilling forth something or other else. In one fist it appeared that the eagle of America, the bald-headed glory, was holding the dastardly robber, Tom Daniels. In the other set of claws they, the citizens of the good town of Crooked Horn, would forthwith place the other evildoer, the chief miscreant, the wretch whose name haunted the minds of all men, et cetera, et cetera, Barry Lynmouth!

If this should not happen, it further appeared from the moving discourse of Mr. Bore that no man could sleep peacefully in his bed, and no man could quietly sit down to enjoy the fruits of his daily labor. Furthermore, little children dared not venture innocently forth on their way to school, nor must they loiter by the roadside to pick the daisies on their way home. Not only was this true, but shame would sit in every bosom, and a stinging taunt of cowardice, and inefficiency, and treason, would be hurled in the face of poor, suffering Crooked Horn by all its smug-faced neighbors.

On the other hand, if Barry Lynmouth were brought back "loaded with chains and opprobrium, as of right he should be," then all would be well. It seemed that, in this case, the land would pour forth its fruits with unstinted hand, and the children would gambol off to school like jolly sheep, and every one would be good, happy, and virtuous. Even the before-mentioned eagle would be appeased, and, rising through the golden and crimson clouds of its glorious sky, would wheel on enormous circling pinions above the happy homes of

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the free and the brave, et cetera, et cetera.

It was a stirring peroration.

Judge Bore got himself into a good, healthy perspiration sawing the air about it. It was truly a stirring sight to see him land upon the thin air of wickedness all manner of right crosses, full-arm swings, lifting uppercuts, overhand crushers, side-slashers, jolts, and jars. He tore evil apart and trampled it underfoot, and if the stock of Barry Lynmouth had been par when that speech began, shares in him would not have been exchanged for a stick of peppermint candy when the good judge had ended.

He waited a little, panting, and he got his applause in a roar. He raised a hand for silence. They roared still louder. He raised both hands. They whooped and yelled.

He said "No, no!" with his rather fat lips several times, and appeared annoyed, and was so—as much as any actor taking curtain calls.

At last he had a chance to speak, but he had hardly declared, "If the assembly is in general agreement with me as to how——" when Rancher Tom Calkins broke out loudly:

"Look at here, Bore—that was the outstandin'est speech that I ever heard you make!"

The applause broke out again, while Judge Bore vainly, bitterly protested, and waved both his hands in the air and shook his head until his plump cheeks quivered.

No matter what came of this, it was a personal triumph for him. The House of Representatives seemed to Judge Bore, at that moment, no farther away than the stoop of the schoolhouse; and the United States Senate was by no means an unattainable goal!

After this, he gradually managed to get silence restored, although a good many of the ladies were still smiling and shaking their heads and looking at the judge through actual tears of admiration. But finally the business of the meeting could be resumed, when Hackett, the assistant district attorney—more assistant than attorney, some one had once rudely said—got up and made a matter-of-fact talk, in which he seconded all of the proposals of the judge. He floated a while on the shining wake of the speech of Bore. Then he stated that they ought to do two things—authorize the sheriff to comb the whole countryside with a fine-toothed comb for the purpose of securing the person of the desired malefactor, and place ample funds in his hands for the hiring of extensive posses; on the other hand, they should place the prisoner, Tom Daniels, partner of the chief criminal, in the capable care of that celebrated and popular supporter of the law.

Hackett was learning from the judge.

He made a point now almost as good as that of the judge by extending his hand toward Jay Cress, and refraining from naming him. There was a great deal of applause again. People enjoyed turning to Cress and nodding and smiling at him, while they smote their hands together.

A wave of silence began to extend from around a form newly risen from one of the school benches. That silence was rather icy. It froze out applause and turned smiles to marble. It was William Oliver who stood there, waiting for a chance to speak.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THUMBS DOWN!

THOSE people knew Oliver, and respected him.

They did not exactly love him, because bankers are not often loved in big cities, and are even apt to be hated in small ones. For there is no pleasure in borrowing to be compared with the pain of repaying—with interest.

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William Oliver was as fair and true and straightforward as steel. He was also on occasion just as hard. He had an edge that had cut certain men to the heart. He had had five bullets fired at him point-blank. He bore the scars of two of them. Mutterers at such places as the veranda in front of the hotel, and loungers in the bars of the town, were apt to shake their heads darkly when the name of the banker was presented to their attention. It is always easy to appear to know more than one cares to speak. There were quantities of people who were ready to adopt that attitude toward the subject of William Oliver. Nevertheless, as before said, he was respected, and even the most reluctant had to admit that he was a good and open-handed citizen, and worth almost any ten others to Crooked Horn. His unboasted and unpublished charities, for one thing, gradually were becoming known. So they listened to him now.

He said: "May I ask a few questions?"

Debaters love questions; orators hate them. Judge Bore was an orator, still panting from his peroration. But he had to say that of course he would be glad to have questions put, and would answer them as well as he could.

"Barry Lynmouth has broken jail in this town," said the banker. "Will you tell me what other crimes he has committed?"

"The detestable crime of manslaughter, for which he was accused, tried by process of law, and convicted," said Judge Bore, "is one."

He was proud of that sentence.

"That crime," said the banker, "is denied by Lew Daniels, the so-called victim of the fight. He and his father and mother and his sister are filling the town paper in Jackson Ford with demands for the reopening of the trial. They declare that they have good evidence to produce."

"What sort of evidence?" asked the judge, with a beetling frown.

He began to wish the banker never had entered that room.

"Evidence on their own oath that Lew Daniels came here seeking the fight, and forced it on Lynmouth. Evidence that Cherry Daniels went to Barry Lynmouth and begged him to let her brother off lightly. And that in return he actually consented to leave the town and avoid the fight."

The judge looked around the room and blinked. He searched for sympathy, and he found it. To the crowd, it was not a matter of the right or wrong of Barry Lynmouth. It was a debate between Bore and the banker, and there was no doubt as to which was the more popular man. Feverishly they waited for the judge's answer. They leaned toward him, and they stared with frowning hostility toward Oliver.

"This is saying a great deal, Mr. Oliver," said the judge.

The crowd sighed with relief. They had not exactly seen how the judge would answer things that were rather generally guessed to be true. This answer had dignity and restraint, even though it did not reply to much. The thrust had been dodged, if not parried.

The banker went on in the same quiet and logical, unemotional manner.

He said: "Aside from the presumed guilt of this man in the Daniels affair, what other crimes are charged against him?"

"His whole life has been one long crime!" thundered the judge.

It was a point—a veritable point! The crowd burst into tumultuous applause, and then waited breathless for the rejoinder of Oliver.

To their surprise, he did not seem at all upset.

He merely said: "He has received legal pardons for every wrongdoing up to the date on which he met Daniels. Does any one deny it?"

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The judge was at a loss. So was every one else.

Said Judge Bore: "Are you retained by Barry Lynmouth to defend him here, sir?"

A good, heavy question, felt the listeners, and nodded their heads.

"I am here," said the banker in his usual unmoved tone, "to defend our public decency and good sense. I'm here to prevent a wrong, if I can."

"What wrong, sir, what wrong?" thundered the judge.

It was useless to thunder at Oliver. Other men had thundered at him before —with guns, even.

"The wrong of persecuting a man who may be trying to live a decent life."

Judge Bore had a gift almost as great as his power of eloquence. He had laughter at command, and he commanded it now. A good, throat-filling laughter that rang and rerang through the room, and in which the crowd spontaneously joined. An ocean of mirth roared against the ceiling, burst out the windows.

"A decent life, indeed!" said the judge, and wiped his eyes.

Then he rapped his knuckles on the desk, as though partly calling for order and partly asking Oliver to talk sense.

"There are at least fifty men who will swear that they have been robbed, assaulted, victimized, within the past few weeks by that archscoundrel, Lynmouth, and the poor boy whom he has corrupted—Tom Daniels!"

Every one murmured. There was an impatient stir. How long was Oliver to take up their good time with his follies?

"I suppose," said Oliver, as calmly as ever, "that at least twenty-five of the fifty are now in this room."

This caused a good deal of craning about and nodding, here and there.

"Is there one man among those witnesses who definitely saw the face or recognized the voice of either Tom Daniels or Barry Lynmouth?" asked William Oliver.

"In the law——" began the judge.

Oliver raised his hand, and even Bore was silent.

"I am not asking you that question," said Oliver, "because I don't believe that you claim to have been hurt in your own pocketbook by Lynmouth. I'm asking what other man dares to say that he identified Barry Lynmouth?"

That "dares to say" had the weight of a blow and the sting of a whiplash. It took away the breath. Certain faces grew crimson. They were the faces of men who had accused Lynmouth and Daniels. Then spoke the nasal, drawling voice of Lynn Hopkins.

"I never said nothin' except that I was robbed by a couple of gents, and one was bigger than the other, and they kind of had the cut of Lynmouth and Daniels. That's all I said. Everybody knew they was on the road!"

People murmured contentedly. Honest Lynn Hopkins! His very drawl was a testimonial in his favor.

"Everybody suspected; but what did any one know?" asked Oliver.

He turned his head slowly. He surveyed all those faces.

"I was in the Paradise coach, to-day," said he. "We were stopped, as you know, by two masked men. They even had two horses, we learned, of the general appearance of Lynmouth's famous mare, Fortune, and Tom Daniels' mount. Every man and woman in that stage would have been willing to swear —and I include myself—that we were stopped and nearly tipped over the cliff by the two archruffians, Lynmouth and Daniels."

People listened breathlessly. The judge looked down and chewed his lip, searching for an answer to what he knew was coming. He wished to appear bland. He merely appeared blank.

"We all would have sworn that our

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lives had been endangered by the pair. But it happened that one of the passengers was not quite what he seemed. He was a hunted man. He was a man-loaded down with opprobrium against which he could not defend himself. He had seen rascals slipping out onto the road and masquerading as himself and his friend. This friend was now a very sick lad. And the hunted man left him, as he thought, in a secure place, and came out to unmask the scoundrelism of which he had become the victim. He put himself in imminent danger. He rode with us to the scene of the holdup. He saw us stretched helpless in the brush."

Here, although not an orator, Mr. Oliver paused, but no one interrupted him. He continued in his grave, quiet way:

"Then our extra passenger jumped into action, and it was such action as I wish you could have been present to see, Judge Bore."

The judge stiffened suddenly. He interlocked his fingers, and twirled the thumbs. He pulled back his head until his first and second double chins disappeared behind his collar. He was being judicially attentive, fair, but a little dubious.

"Our extra passenger was encumbered by a long linen duster," continued Oliver. "But he stepped a little faster than a frightened cat. He shot down the two bandits. Yet he did not shoot to kill. There was no murder in him, Judge Bore. He was simply trying to defend his injured reputation, you see. He risked his life again, in order to put those fellows down without killing them. He saved the horses, which were in a murderous tangle. And then, instead of waiting for thanks, he went off on the horse of one of the masqueraders."

Still Oliver was not done. He finished:

"This notorious thief and villain then turned loose the horse of the bandit, and I believe that the animal has just come into town.

"Now, then, Judge Bore, I have pointed out one definite and true fact which will be to the credit of Mr. Lynmouth. I want to know what man, woman, or child can point out a single other fact against him, in order to justify the tiger hunt and slaughter with which you are proposing to sweep the country at the present moment? That is all I have to say."

But he remained on his feet, turning gradually, slowly, from face to face, and receiving not a sign of an answer.

Instead, he found all eyes fixed upon the judge, expecting him to be their champion.

"Gentlemen, and my dear Mr. Oliver," said the judge, desperately cornered, but suddenly equipped with a thought, "there is such a thing as public opinion. I thank Heaven. It is above evidence. Public opinion did not wait to be logical. It rose in its instinctive might and freed the thirteen young colonies from the vicious grasp of the mother country. Public opinion is the great instrument which organized our liberty, created our law, maintained our Union, banished slavery and chains, and to this moment supports and strengthens the hands of the law. Without public opinion what is law? It is tyranny! With it, the law marches forward in a brilliant light.

"You ask me for an answer, Mr. Oliver! Here are my answers!"

At this, he stretched out both his hands toward the eager faces in the crowd.

"The honest women and the brave men who have met here to-day," said he, "because they feel that Barry Lynmouth is a public danger, a public disgrace—they are my answer to you, Mr. Oliver! Do you find enough of them? Do you find any fault with them?"

Mr. Oliver surveyed them without

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either conviction or admiration in his eye. Then he turned on his heel and left the schoolroom.

Thunderous applause for the judge followed.

But it left Judge Bore a little retrospective. He knew that he had won, but the doors of the United States Senate seemed to be in the more shadowy distance just now. He felt that it might be a costly victory.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DARK AND FAIR.

AS William Oliver had striven to the utmost of his strength against public opinion and Judge Bore for the sake of the outcast, his daughter endured a trial in the same cause, lost as it was. She had lain down in her room behind drawn, dusky shutters. But she did not relax. With her arms thrown wide, and her hands gripped hard, she looked up at the ceiling and felt again the iron grip which had lifted her from her seat to safety. And again she saw the bowed and swaying form of the invalid in the linen duster.

She answered a tapping at her door and a Mexican house *moza* came in with word that a certain Señorita Daniels was waiting below to see her. That name went through the brain of Kate Oliver with an electric thrill of pain.

People were saying strange things about the Daniels family and their devotion to gun-fighting Barry Lynmouth. They said that Tom Daniels was as willing to die as to go to prison for the sake of the outlaw. They said that Cherry Daniels herself rode out in whatever way she could to help the hunted man. Cherry was young and pretty, moreover, said the same flying rumors. She would not believe it. She had her own opinion of creatures who would throw themselves without shame in the path of a man. She sat straight up on her bed.

"Tell her that I'm not home—that I can't see her!" she exclaimed.

The *moza* drew the door shut.

Then Kate Oliver leaped from the bed and raced to throw the door open. The pulse of its breath fanned her face and lifted the hair along her shoulders.

The servant stood immediately before her. She had not stirred a step, and her smoky eyes looked with somber interest upon her young mistress.

It was almost as though she knew that she would be recalled before she had time to begin the delivery of her message. Kate Oliver felt half shamed, but her excitement still held her.

"Tell Miss Daniels that I'll be down at once," she said. "No, no—ask her to come up here at once."

She closed the door, amazed at herself. There was a fierce pulse in her temples. She felt that her face was hot, and glancing at herself in the mirror, she hardly recognized her flushed cheeks and her gleaming eyes.

She slid her arms into a dressing gown. She gathered her bright hair into one massive, carelessly twisted coil, and then the door was opened for Cherry Daniels, just as Kate Oliver was pushing the shutters wide.

In came a thrust of sunshine that set dancing ten million dusty motes. Half the room blazed; half was left in dusk; and in the flame of the sun stood Cherry Daniels.

Kate Oliver, gathering her gown at the breast, and staring, felt that the stranger could stand the full brilliance of the sun. She was made for it, to endure and thrive in its heat. Her rich olive skin would not shrivel or darken in the hottest August day on the desert. Her black eye would not grow dusty with fatigue in no matter how many miles of wild riding. She looked like a young Indian, with the smile of the wilderness still on her lips and freedom in her eyes. She was shorter and even slighter than Kate Oliver, but in

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the poise of her head and the tilt of the chin there was something that made the banker's daughter feel slight and frail.

Cherry Daniels closed the door behind her and, like a man, took the broad-brimmed hat from her head. The red mark of the heavy band crossed her brow.

"I'm Cherry Daniels," said she, and then struck straight home. "I've come here to talk to you a little about Barry Lynmouth."

To Kate Oliver there was something brutally crude and harsh about this direct statement. At the same moment, it weakened her knees and took her breath. She managed to offer a chair, and to take the hat of the girl. Cherry Daniels sat down, slim, erect, her dark eyes steadily upon the face of Kate Oliver.

"Or maybe you guessed right off that I'd come about him," she went on.

"I didn't know," said Kate foolishly. "I only—that is——"

"Don't get yourself all tangled up," said the other. "The way of this is that Barry's in hot water. I want to help him. Do you?"

Once again it was a bludgeon stroke of frankness from which Kate winced.

"Yes," she said. "I do."

She sat down, but gingerly, watching this lithe, brown-faced youngster as though in terror of fire.

Pretty?

She would have been glad if she could have dismissed the face of Cherry with such a weak word. But no. There was rare charm, beauty. She tried, suddenly, to imagine a man who might not find this wild girl enchanting; but all the world of men seemed empty.

"You want to help him," said Cherry. "That's a good start. But how much do you want to help?"

"Yesterday he saved my life," answered the girl. "My father's life, too."

"Yeah," said Cherry Daniels, with slangy indifference. "I know about the stagecoach. You'd never turn him away on a cold night if he come and battered at your door. That what you mean? Or d'you mean that you'd do something for him?"

Kate Oliver said nothing. There was a tremor in her throat. She dared not trust the steadiness of her voice.

"I mean to say," went on Cherry, "that I've been trying to figger out why Barry should stick so close to Crooked Horn. He's never had a square deal, here. All they want to give him here is a rope around the neck. He's got no old friends in this town. They want his hide, here, and that's all. Am I wrong?"

Still Kate did not answer. And still, for an unknown reason, she grew more and more afraid of this terribly direct girl.

"Of course I hit on the answer," went on Cherry Daniels. "It's you. Am I wrong?" She did not wait. She said simply: "Does he mean a lot to you?"

Her hostess could merely stammer. And, to put her at her ease, Cherry continued:

"I ask because he's about all that I can see inside the rim of any one sky at a time. He's the tallest and the straightest that I've ever seen, the squarest shooter, and the best pal. I'd give a hand to get a smile from him; but all I could ever get out of him was politeness."

She smiled again, but Kate Oliver could guess that there was profound meaning under her light manner of speech.

"I've tried to get him away from Crooked Horn," said Cherry. "And if he'd turn, I'd go barefoot to keep him company. I've tried to let him see that, too. But a man can sure be blind when he don't want to see."

Breathlessly, Kate Oliver listened.

Cherry Daniels had, as the gamblers'

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saying is, laid her cards upon the table, and now Kate saw that something of the same kind was expected of her. The position was made clearer and clearer.

"I know," said the other girl, "where Barry will be this evenin', near to Crooked Horn. Would you go there and meet him and try to turn him away?"

"If I could influence him——" began Kate, and stuck there.

Her terror had grown. She felt that she was beyond her depth—that the water was closing above her lips.

"I dunno," said the visitor. "Maybe you couldn't. But he might turn away if you'd go with him."

"What do you mean?"

Cherry leaned forward and studied Kate Oliver.

"Yeah, you know what I mean," she said. "I don't mean to go as far as a minister's with him, and then leave him in the lurch. I mean, to go and keep right on riding with him, whether he goes up or down. I've talked to you straight; will you talk straight to me?"

"How can I tell that I would influence him at all?" asked Kate.

"I can tell," said Cherry, nodding critically. "Black hair and black eyes don't go as far as the yellow and blue. Can't be seen as well. Don't light up as well. The blondes are the ones that make the little boys open their eyes, and the big boys, too. I've been half a minute from bleachin' my hair ten times in my life. But never so near as I am while I sit here and look at you."

The flattery in this speech fell almost unheeded upon the ears of Kate Oliver. She felt a profound respect for this girl, and a pity for her, too; because she could guess that she was hearing the truth, and that the cause of poor Cherry Daniels was lost indeed. But her own problem was taking her by the throat.

Now she saw not poor Cherry Daniels, but as through the screen of the front door, the face of Barry Lynmouth, when she had confronted him and denied him in a horror of shame.

Cherry seemed to mistake this silence.

"It's the Jay Cress business that stops you," she said. "Well, it never would stop me. I can't explain it. I don't have to have it explained. Can't you feel that way, too?"

Kate tried to find words, but she could not.

"If there never was a thing before, in his life," said Cherry Daniels, "he's done enough since to show what he's made of. He's tied all of Crooked Horn into knots. He's met my brother and dropped him—shot the guns out of his hands. Did that take nerve? I think it did! Could Jay Cress show the same? I don't think he could. What happened to Barry when he met Cress? Well, I don't know. Hypnotism. I've thought of that. Have you?"

"No," said Kate faintly. "Not till this moment!"

Cherry Daniels stood up.

"I've got no right to press you for any answer," she said. "I don't suppose that I've got any right to persuade you. But I know that if you don't do something, nothing else can ever make Barry turn back from Crooked Horn."

"Why is he coming?"

"He's coming to set my poor brother Tom free. Account of Lew, he's been outlawed again. Account of Tom, he'll get himself shot to pieces——"

Her voice trembled away to silence. She blinked, and then she continued with a wonderful steadiness:

"I'm going to wait for you on the rim of the town, beyond the sheriff's house. You know the poplars there?"

"Yes," said Kate faintly.

The darkness of the trees in prospect possessed her with fear once more.

"I'll wait for you there along about sunset, or a shade after. That'll be the best time. Will you come along with

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me? No, don't you answer me now. Wait till you're alone. I reckon that before long, you'll be holdin' your breath and dead anxious for that sunset to come. If you ain't—then Heaven help Barry Lynmouth!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

TWO GIRLS RIDE.

ALL in one rush the rest of that day went by for Kate Oliver.

It was a fierce debate in which she prayed for more and more time, so that she could find the proper answer, all the while knowing that time alone would not answer it, for the inevitable darkness was coming, and the broad sun was rolling down toward the western horizon like a great wheel. It bulged. It turned crimson. It magnified in size, and still she was walking hurriedly up and down in her room, debating.

If she went, could she dare to tell him that she loved him, and that she would really follow him to the ends of the world?

She remembered, again, the sick horror with which she had heard the ghastly tale of Jay Cress and the humiliation of her lover. The same sick wave swept over her again and left her cold. For she had loved him as a master of men, and she had denied him as a weakling and a traitor to his fame.

Then she thought of Cherry Daniels, and her bright, resolute eyes. She, at least, never would be untrue to a great devotion. She was rather one to nail the colors to the mast and go down with the ship. This comparison shamed the girl.

Then she remembered her father, and, sitting down suddenly by the window, she told herself that she would never be able to go. At that very moment she heard his footstep coming up the walk to the front door, and she ran down to meet him.

She found him coldly reserved, drawn into the heart of some inward trouble.

Then he said to her:

"They're organizing Crooked Horn like an army to capture Barry Lynmouth."

She said nothing, but drew back a little into the shadow near the door. The sun was almost down.

"You cared about him once, Kate," said her father. "Are you really made of ice, my dear? I've tried to talk to them. That bull-faced idiot, Bore, was in a speechmaking humor, and all he could think about was Lynmouth's crimes. What crimes? They won't listen to reason. I tell you, ten good men in a group can be as evil and as cruel as any one criminal! But you don't care," he added almost bitterly, as she stood silent, still. "Oh, you women are made of stone! It takes brass buttons and a brass band to melt your hearts!"

He strode into the house and let the screen door slam with a metallic jingle behind him.

But Kate remained outside, head bent, looking down the avenue of trees, now thinly flooded with the dusk of the evening.

She tried to think. She tried to ask a question of her heart, but all remained a blur and a jumble, except the thought of Cherry Daniels waiting there among the darkening poplars beyond the sheriff's house. So her own life, it seemed to Kate, was darkening.

Death would come to Barry Lynmouth. Or else, having achieved that romantic and impossible deed of freeing Tom Daniels from the law, he would be off into the wilderness with beautiful Cherry Daniels.

Beautiful Cherry—and how beautiful she was, how loyal and how brave, without a selfish thought, with the courage of a man, and the great heart of a child!

Now, as the eyes of Kate grew dim

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with tears, from the kitchen window she heard a shrill whistle piping, and the theme of it pierced her ears and reached her heart.

"What made the ball so fine?
Robin Adair!
What made the assembly shine?
Robin Adair!"

She listened with bated breath.

And then all her heart rushed out to Barry Lynmouth. Her doubts were scattered suddenly. She turned into the house, and, hurrying to her room, she changed quickly into a riding dress, and went out hatless to the stable.

There she saddled her fastest, although not her surest, horse. The result was five minutes of frantic pitching, which she barely managed to sit out. Yet at last the bucking ceased, and, avoiding the drive past the front of the house, she headed across the pasture trail.

A loud, distant voice called after her: "Kate, Kate! Where are you going?"

With the speed of her gallop that voice was blurred and faded behind her, but a guilty shudder passed through her body. For she knew that it had been her father who had called after her.

She went on at high speed. She jumped the fence, waded the creek, labored up the slope, and made the standing horse jump the fence on the farther side.

As she went on, she knew that she had done a thing which she never would have ventured on in the sanity of daylight. But now it seemed nothing. She judged; she did not feel the danger.

She was galloping across a wide field. The smell of tarweed was rank and pungent; it swished like water around the sweeping hoofs of the good horse. Then trees rushed like wind around her, and out under the red-stained sky she broke again.

She could see a light to her left. That was the sheriff's house, of course. Chick Anthony was an old acquaintance—a friend, even. But he was not her friend on this night, because she was riding outside the law. At the thought of this, and of his wife's pinched, tiresome face, she felt a new sense of wonder.

For it was she, Kate Oliver, who was doing this thing!

She could remember whispers that had buzzed not too softly around her. Other girls were wild and did wild things. But safe Kate Oliver, gentle Kate Oliver, sweet Kate Oliver, kind and good Kate Oliver—she could be trusted as safely as the rising of the sun and the setting thereof.

She felt that her old self was whirling away on either hand with the flying trees and melting into a blown smoke behind her. She went on, riding with a good pull, because the horse felt his oats and came strongly on the bit. He ran nervously, enjoying his own speed, but afraid of the night. But there was no fear in him like the fear that came up in the girl when she saw before her the poplar trees standing closely together, shoulder to shoulder, and in the last daylight their leaves winking like dull steel.

She took a pull and brought the horse back to a gallop, back to a lope. She could realize then how fast she had been flying. Her face burned from the friction of the air.

She was almost on the verge of the trees when she saw a dark form on a dark horse, motionless beneath the shadow. Instinctively she drew aslant from that point. For it did not seem that any woman could have the courage to wait there under the wing of the shadow, with the grim night thickening, and stealthy danger whispering through the evening air.

Then she saw that the rider was small, and the horse small also. Sud-

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denly she knew that it was Cherry Daniels, and swung in toward her.

She felt a new wonder, then.

Cherry Daniels, brisk, keen, fresh, and vital, was there to lead a rival out to find the man she loved. Cherry Daniels, giving her heart away for the sake of a selfless affection. It made Kate look inward not for the first time, but for the first time with a glance that went to the core of her heart. She saw herself against a horizon of blazing light as a dim, misty creature, never very bad, never capable of badness; never very good, either, because incapable of goodness.

Then she drew up beside her guide.

"I'm late!" she gasped.

"You?" said Cherry, calmly surprised. "No, you're right on the dot."

"Let's hurry on," said Kate.

"What's the hurry?"

"I'll have to get back."

"Maybe you'll never get back."

Kate checked her horse to a full stop. "Never go back?" she asked.

"No, maybe not. Are you afraid of that?"

"Never go back!" gasped Kate.

"You gotta throw your hat in the ring and go in after it, to-night," said Cherry. "There ain't such a thing as being halfway, if you're to deal with Barry Lynmouth."

"No," said Kate. "No—I see. Otherwise, I'd never persuade him."

"He's as crafty as a fox. He's likely to read your mind, anyway," said Cherry.

"Let's go on," breathed Kate.

"Take it easy," suggested Cherry. "Take it easy and make up your mind. You got your lines ready?"

"What lines?"

"Why, it'll have to be like a play. You think that just appearing will be enough. No, it won't. You'll have to talk. He's got a head on him, and you'll have to talk to that."

"I can say——"

"Sure," said Cherry, filling in the pause generously. "You can say that you can't live without him, but you'll have to talk about Tom. You'll have to talk about my brother. I've tried. But I'm Tom's sister, and don't count, anyway. You'll have to point out that there ain't any proof against Tom, and that he'll be sure to get off at his trial, anyway, and that taking him out of the jail is only making him sure to get to prison, or a lead diet, pretty soon. You'll have to talk about Tom. Maybe he'll listen to you, if you talk hard and fast enough. I don't know. You'll have to think up the ways of persuadin', and they'll have to be good ways, if you're to turn him back from Crooked Horn."

"I'll try to think—I—my head's swimming, Cherry."

"Well, you start off by having no father, no mother, no home, no nothing except Barry Lynmouth. If you can look at him and tell yourself that he's heaven, and life, and a happy home, all wrapped up in one man, for you—then you might be able to persuade him. Is he those things to you?"

"I don't know. I seem to be a new person to-night, and I'm not sure of myself."

"He's sure of himself," said Cherry. "He's as cold and as hard as steel, right now. You make up your mind. He's down there in that old deserted shack in the hollow, there, where Bud Newton and Paul Bright used to live. You can see it from here."

Kate could, very dimly, for the sky was darkening fast, and the moon was not yet up. Then it seemed to the girl that the pungent fragrance of the tarweed was speaking to her, and the whisper in the evening wind. Doubt left her. She saw her lover with more than the light of day.

But was he still her lover?

"You're not stopping, Cherry?" she said. "Must I go on all alone?"

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"Yeah," drawled Cherry Daniels. "I reckon that I won't be much use, after this far. I'm only good to show you the way."

She laughed, softly, and the laughter broke off on a note that wrenched the heart of Kate Oliver. Yet she had judgment enough to say no more, but let the horse follow its own lead, and it went with cautiously pricking ears straight toward the little hut that was located in the hollow, blind as it was with darkness.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FAILURE.

AS Kate came nearer, the shack grew larger to her eye. She could see the sag of the roof line, and the crooked twist of the stovepipe, but she was very close before she made out a horse cropping the grass near by, with an empty saddle on its back.

Her own mount went slower and slower, picking up its feet cautiously, as though it were treading upon marshland. Then a low voice called from the shadows:

"Is that you, Cherry?"

She found that she could not answer. Her horse halted with a jerk, trembled, and stiffened its muscles for a spring away. It seemed to instantly recognize danger, and fear, certainly, was in her also.

A form detached itself from the dark of the shack and came toward Kate. It reached the head of her horse and stretched a hand out. Suddenly the horse relaxed and was still.

"Kate!" said Barry Lynmouth.

She tried to find the words which Cherry Daniels had told her to rehearse, but they were lost in a spinning mist. She heard him asking her why she had come, and found still that her tongue was lost. He became silent in turn. For an eternity of some seconds she remained there in the saddle, looking down at the black silhouette of his head and strong shoulders, seeing no feature of his face, but, nevertheless, looking into him as she never had done before. She thought that now she could see in him the wildness of a child, the folly of a child also.

But that was not all. He was to other men as a thoroughbred to plow horses; and for that very reason, no doubt, they hated him. She saw him again as he had been at the dance, long ago, laughing, loving danger.

Other men would have kept on talking, to make it easier for her, but Lynmouth was waiting still.

She slipped from the saddle. The darkness, then, seemed to sweep up from the ground and swallow her; the head and shoulders of the outlaw towered above her.

"Cherry brought you here?" asked Lynmouth.

"Yes," she answered, and even with the speaking of that one word, she felt easier. Speech became possible.

"What on earth possessed her?" asked he.

"She thought I might persuade you to go home with me."

"What do you mean, Kate? To your home?"

"No," she replied. "To our home."

"Do you mean that you're coming to me, Kate?"

"Yes, if you'll have me."

She grew tense, as she said it, for the other Barry Lynmouth would, at that, have had her instantly in his arms; but this new man merely made a pause before he answered:

"It's a fine, brave thing, to come out to me like this. I suppose I understand it, too. It's to keep me from trying to help Tom—to keep me out of the trap, you'd say?"

"You wouldn't be helping him," she explained. "You never could reach him—not even you!"

"Are you sure of that?"

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"Yes, yes, sure! They've raised the town, Barry dear. They've got together the fighting men. Jay Cress is there——"

Her voice caught.

"That's all right," replied Lynmouth calmly. "His name is no terror to me. Jay Cress and his four, I suppose?"

"Yes. Such men as I've never seen before. And Chick Anthony is back again, furious because he wasn't able to catch you at the Jarvis place. You see, they all understand that you'll risk anything to get Tom Daniels free. And knowing that you'll try even the impossible, they're steady and prepared for your coming—they expect you this very night!"

"I knew most of that before," said he.

"And still you came on?"

"You see that I'm here."

"Will you tell me what Tom Daniels can gain, Barry? They have no proof against him, and they'll set him free at his trial."

"They had no proof against me," answered Lynmouth. "But they were ready with their prison sentence."

"They hated you. They don't hate Tom Daniels."

"I would trust the law," said the robber, "as I'd trust a pack of dogs. They're safe when they've eaten themselves fat. The law has to eat men, and just now there's an appetite in Crooked Horn for the Daniels-Lynmouth brand."

"If he's taken out, he's outlawed," she said.

"If he's left in, he'll be put in the penitentiary."

"And even if he were, for a little while, he's young."

"It isn't the time; it's the poison of the penitentiary that counts," said he.

Kate felt herself half beaten before her argument had well begun. Tears came into her eyes.

"Will you please let me talk to you on my own account, Barry?" she asked him.

She heard him sigh. "Let me tell you what you're going to say," he suggested. Then he went on, taking her pause as permission:

"You're going to say that you and I should be married. Is that it, Kate?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"Then we should gallop off together, it hardly matters where?"

"Yes, yes," said the girl. And she moved a little closer to him.

The level, steady voice stopped her again.

"The trouble is, that there has to be an ending to every journey, Kate. That's the curse of being young and trying to be happy. That is, of trying to be free and happy. There's no freedom. I begin to see that. One man can be free for a little while, but if he's free, he's bound to be lonely. Even friendship is a bondage, in a sense. And people living in their towns and cities, they hate the outsider who dares to pretend to be happy by himself. But they're right. There's no real happiness except in company with other folks. Finally, a man has to marry, have children. And how can he raise them in a desert. They have a right to belong to the herd if they care to. And if they stay away too long, they'll be misjudged when they try to return, as I was misjudged by every one—even by your father and by you."

"We've repented, Barry," said she. "My father is trying with all his might to change the opinion of people about you. And I've come here to ask you to forgive me, Barry, and to take me if you will." He threw out his hands until his arms were almost about her, and she could hear a faint groan of eagerness rising and checked in his throat.

But he stepped back suddenly.

"I've answered you before," he said, his voice harsh with pain. "I don't

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question that you mean what you say. I don't argue that most of this is pity, and a feeling that you must repay me for having done something for you on the stage the other day. But even if you mean what your coming here seems to mean, I couldn't take you, Kate. If you and I are willing, the world isn't willing. And we're slaves, all of us, to the world and in the world. We can't escape. Go back to your father's house. It's the only right thing."

"There's something else," she said, half choked with grief and with fear of this new man who spoke with the voice of Barry Lynmouth.

"There is something else," said Lynmouth. "I'll tell you what it is, and you'll despise me for it. I've seen enough of the mob in Crooked Horn to detest them. They've licked my hand; and then they've bitten me. I think that I detest them, and yet I can't die happy until I've tried to prove to them that I'm a man."

"By letting yourself be murdered by numbers? Is that a proof?" asked the girl, trembling.

"I must reach Jay Cress," said the outlaw. "He knows that I'm coming for him, and he's prepared. He has his four gunmen to help him. But I must get at him through them. If I once reach him—and I'll have to pass him to get to Tom Daniels, I know—then he goes down and my name goes up, or else I go down and end the misery that I'm in now. I tell you, Kate, that I've been able to keep my head up all my life, until I met Jay Cress, and he bought me. I tried to tell your father that, and even he smiled."

"But he won't smile now, Barry!"

"Other people do. They won't when I've met Cress man to man. Guns or hands——"

His voice rose and rang. He checked himself with an effort.

"You really must go back, Kate," said he.

She saw that it was a hopeless task that she had undertaken. She turned in passive obedience, and he helped her strongly onto the horse.

It was the only time that he touched her. He did not even linger beside her or take her hand, but stepped back instantly. She tried to speak some farewell, but her voice was too broken, and Lynmouth made not even the effort.

She rode slowly up the slope of the hollow.

Beside the next trees, a horseman swung up to her. It was Cherry Daniels, but Cherry did not pause. She merely slowed her mount to a lope, and then darted past, as though the fallen head of the other girl had told her a story eloquent enough.

But Kate Oliver went back to her father's house slowly, keeping to the roundabout roads.

She found the whole establishment frantic with excitement over her prolonged absence. She was an hour late for dinner!

She put up her horse in the stable, dodged questions, and with hanging head she went up to her room.

There her father found her stretched on the bed, face down. He sat beside her and stroked her head gently.

When she was able to talk she said:

"It was Barry. I went to meet him."

He did not answer or comment. He simply let his hand rest lightly on her head and waited.

"He's coming into Crooked Horn this night," said Kate Oliver. "He's going to let himself be killed trying to get Tom Daniels out! I wanted to stop him. I offered to go away with him."

Her father started, but still he said nothing.

"Is it true?" she asked suddenly. "Is it true that he tried to tell you that Jay Cress had bought him to do that shameful thing?"

"Yes. He tried to tell me."

"And that you smiled?"

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"Yes."

"Because of that, he'll let himself be killed to-night, I think!"

"Aye," said Oliver, "it very well may be!"

He went to the window and looked out into the darkness. All the windows gleamed with lamplight; the wind went through the trees with a rustle like crumpling silk; and the stars shone thin and far beyond them.

"Aye," said the banker, "disbelief and doubt make a bad profession. I've handled money too long to handle men now. Guns kill their tens, and sneers kill their thousands."

To be concluded in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

MINING TOWNS RISE AND FALL

IN 1860, when the first census was taken of the State of Colorado, there were but thirty-four thousand inhabitants, the result of one year's trek to the gold fields. Going over the census of the succeeding years we find that certain towns have loomed large for a time and then dwindled down to small villages and sometimes disappeared altogether.

Montana City, which is situated on the east bank of the Platte, holds the record of being Colorado's first "ghost town." A few weeks later St. Charles and Auraria on Cherry Creek rivaled Montana City, but Denver soon became the "Queen City of the Plains" and swallowed them up.

Towns sprung up overnight in Gregory's Gulch along Clear Creek. At one end of the gold-strewn canyon was Black Hawk, at the other end Nevada City, and halfway between an enterprising settler hung over his supply store a sign which read "Central City." This was a sufficient excuse to start a town in those days, and within a year it was the center of a lively business district. The city soon seethed with humanity, and mills and wooden shacks filled the steep slopes. Central City was then Denver's greatest rival.

In June, 1868, the Boston & Colorado Smelting Co. started its first smelter near Black Hawk. During the eight following years Black Hawk's future looked bright, but when richer fields were opened the smelting plant was moved away and shadows began to fall. In the same year a disastrous fire swept Central City, destroying its fragile wooden structures, and thus this once-flourishing district became doomed. By 1880, stamp mills stood idle, with rotting machinery and sluice boxes wrecked; at every turn were signs of blasted hopes.

Town after town through the State of Colorado can tell of similar experiences. As we glance at each year's census we can easily trace disappointments, for fame, gold, and silver are fleeting. But in spite of all this, Colorado, which is only seventy years old, now has a population of over one million three hundred thousand, and is growing in leaps and bounds.

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Windy Fights Alone

By Robert Ormond Case

Author of "Partner's Play," etc.

AS "Windy" DeLong rode into Condon, in the cool of evening, he pushed back his battered sombrero, slumped in the saddle in an attitude of ease, and reached for the makings. His mustache bristled as he lighted his cigarette. As he blew a cloud of smoke upward with a regal gesture, his lean, hard-bitten features writhed into a facial contortion intended as an unwilling grin. In his glittering eye was the complacence of a starving shoat that has glimpsed a broken corncrib from afar, has hastened thither with all possible speed, and now finds the feast at hand.

It was Saturday night in Condon, and on Saturday night in the robust metropolis of the cattle country, so its admirers affirmed, rattlesnakes forgathered and wild cats squalled in unison. Already, as his mount entered the twin rows of huge poplars that guarded the southern extremity of the main thoroughfare, he could see colorful crowds milling beneath the blazing arc lights, heard the lilt of music, laughter, and genial shouts, marked the stream of cash customers entering and emerging from swinging doors of glittering palaces of amusement, refreshment, and chance. A carnival note throbbing in the very air proclaimed that the heat and dust of the workaday week were already in the process of being obliterated from memory; and the night, in a manner of speaking, was, thus far, but a pup.

"Froth an' frivolity," Windy told himself, shaking his head. "Penny-ante pursuits. Why should a gent of substance an' heavy mentality waste his time at this hairy-chested crossroads? The answer to that question is, nobody

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knows. Flesh is frail. Mankind is prone to err. Hoss, what's holdin' you back?"

On the right and less than a block away, loomed the square-fronted livery and feed barn. Windy urged his mount in that direction. Short as this traverse was down the thickening traffic of Main Street, he gained his first, vague impression that something was amiss, a hint that troublous events in which he might easily be the central character awaited on the as-yet-unwritten record of the evening.

These clews were slight. Yet for Windy's belligerent and watchful sensibilities they were sufficient to suggest that grief lay ahead. His friends, for example, of whom a legion were forgathered, hailed him genially in passing. But they continued to grin after he had waved a careless response; and from the tail of his eyes he marked them shake their heads after the manner of men who hope for the best and fear the worst. This was a suspicious enough circumstance; but the veiled manner of those who were not numbered among the ranks of his friends was even more ominous. He had many enemies in the cattle country; and a guarded, gloating appraisal, a leering anticipation of coming events revealed in the gaze of citizens who were willing at all times to pay out cash money for the privilege of observing Windy DeLong enmeshed in a humiliating jack pot of any hue was vastly disturbing.

His beneficent mood somewhat ruffled by these observations, he executed a column right into the livery barn and swung away from the saddle. The lugubrious Lem, proprietor of the equine hostelry and a friend of old standing, rose up from his rawhide-upholstered chair and eyed him pessimistically.

"Hi!" Windy greeted this one.

"Ho!" responded Lem.

These civilities concluded, Lem led his mount away and returned, shaking his head.

"What's it all about?" Windy demanded, with some asperity. "Here's a lowly an' well-wishin' cowboy comes slopin' into town, seekin' rest an' innocent diversion; an' what does he find? Half of the blasted population lookin' him over sorrowful an' pitying, like here's a fatted calf that's ripe for slaughter an' gettin' ready to beller at his own funeral. The other half lickin' their chops, gleeful, as much as to say: 'Get set, citizens, here he comes. The great warty reptyle himself. An' will he get scalped? It'll be a shambles, brethren; no less.' Give us the low-down, mister, before I bust out in a nervous rash. How come? Who says so, an' why?"

The gaunt Lem produced a huge slab of black tobacco and bit into it sorrowfully. He peered about him, glanced back over his shoulder, and spoke in guarded tones.

"DeLong," he said, "a word to the wise saves plenty stitches. Watch yore step in this village to-night."

"Bah!" said Windy. "Get a holt of yourself, Lem. You sound like one of them moanin' bars. In what particular have I got to step dainty an' dignified?"

"Bull Morgan's in town," said Lem.

"What of it?" Windy demanded. "That don't sound like no crack o' doom. With malice toward none, I'd just as soon plaster that four-flusher over the landscape here as anywhere else. An' on the other hand, if the bulgin' maverick keeps out of my way, an' conducts himself like a dignified shorthorn who ain't ready yet to be served up as sirloin an' spareribs, he can live to a ripe old age. You know me, Lem. I ain't a gent that's lookin' for trouble. I got a habit of runnin' myself clean into the ground gettin' away from grief."

"Sure, sure," said Lem. "Yore repu-

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tation as a peacemaker is a crown o' glory. But I'm just tellin' you, thass all."

"There's more here than meets the eye," averred Windy, his mustache bristling. "Come clean now, Lem. What's Morgan up to? Has he come to town with a bunch of bruisers with him to back his play? Whereas that would shorely be flattering, it don't mean nothin' to me. Leave me grasp him once by the face an' the odds would still be even. For a long time I been havin' a vision of chiseling that overstuffed grandstander down to average size, an' it haunts me."

"I'll tell you this," said Lem, "an' after that, on account of heavy bets already bein' placed on the proposition, I'll tell you nothin'. Morgan's arranged a frame-up that looks shockproof, DeLong. You'll meet up with it right pronto after you've showed yore nose along the boolevard. I been rackin' my brains industrious, ever since I heard about this sweet-scented deal, tryin' to figger a play for you. But it looks onbeatable. At the same time, cowboy, havin' observed you trail with a brand of luck that would cause a gent to fall into a sewer and come out smellin' like a rose an' with his pockets full of watches, I've done placed a li'l' bet on you myself. All of five bucks."

"Now that's real white of you, Lem," said Windy appreciatively. "Five bucks, huh?"

"Well," Lem admitted. "I done insisted on odds, an' finally hoisted him up to five to one."

This, Windy was forced to admit, was not so good. He strove to extract further details of the crafty Morgan's frame-up, but to no avail. Considerably mystified and belligerently on guard, he strode forth, pulling his hat lower over his eyes with the instinctive gesture of one heading into a storm.

To the casual eye, it might have appeared that the circumstances of the jack pot in which Windy presently became enmeshed were not of sufficient importance to attract the undivided attention of the genial army. Yet those forgathered of a Saturday night in the robust metropolis were of a type keenly interested in what was known locally as "world affairs." Windy's colorful and explosive personality was known throughout the high country. His enmity toward "Bull" Morgan, and his frequent brushes with that overbearing and venomous cattle baron of the John Day, provided food for jovial gossip in village and trail camp and around far chuck-wagon fires. Momentarily, therefore, the delightful announcement that Bull Morgan had sworn, on this evening, to "get DeLong's goat," automatically advanced the occasion to the front rank of public notice.

Being ignorant, as yet, of what species of hostile events awaited, Windy turned his steps instinctively toward Flannigan's, popular oasis of refreshment and chance that dominated the glittering Main Street. He pushed through the swinging doors, and paused to look about him, thumbs hooked in his belt.

The big room was blue with tobacco smoke, reeking of strong liquor, noisy with shouts, laughter, the clink of poker chips and impact of ivory against ivory. With Windy's entrance came a momentary lull in the roar of conversation. Poker addicts twisted in their chairs to peer in his direction. Pool players leaned upon their cues and grinned at him. Thirsty ones leaning upon the bar appraised him with sidelong glances. Only for an instant the silence held; then, with a haste that was obviously designed to cover up a curious interest that could not help but be disconcerting to one cast in self-deprecatory mold, the genial traffic began again.

Friends beamed upon him. Others leered. Windy sidled to the bar, hooked

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his heel over the brass rail, rested an elbow on the mahogany in an attitude of ease, and beckoned with crooked finger for nourishment.

Flannigan himself, hard-bitten and white-aproned proprietor, hastened to set forth a glass. He was a grizzled person with close-cropped head indented by strange scars. His ears were of the type known as cauliflower, his features battered and expressionless. Windy fixed a glittering eye upon him and spoke with a familiarity born of years.

"Garsong," he said, "I understand they's a wrist-slappin' an' nose-pullin' bee goin' to be staged hereabouts. What's the dope on it?"

Flannigan shrugged his shoulders. "Nice night, ain't it?" he said.

"Don't you be upstage," Windy warned. "Just recall all the free lunches I've et in this den of iniquity an' you'll figger I'm entitled to consideration. A gent in yore position can't help but have his finger on the throbbin' pulse of things. I'm all in a nervous twitter from what I've heard, an' I ain't heard nothin' yet."

"A gent in my position likewise ain't playin' no favorites, hombre," said Flannigan, grinning. "He's got to be one of them neutrals you hear about—too proud to fight an' too fat to run. I'm also stakeholder for too many bets to risk gettin' scalped by tippin' you off an' thereby permittin' yore active fancy to figger a way out of the woods. I'll tell you this. Best lap up a li'l' more sustenance. Morgan an' a troop of trained gorillas will soon be trompin' on yore heels."

"Yeah?" said Windy. "Well, feller, if it's goin' to be a massacre, I reckon this here's as good a battlefield as any. If I knew which way trouble was comin' from, I'd sashay forth to meet it. Since I don't, I'll just plant my shoulder blades on one of them chairs over yonder an' sit tight. O. K.?"

"O. K." said Flannigan. "The furniture's all insured. Ride 'em slick, cowboy. Use yore spurs. If you get a holt with yore teeth, hang on an' growl. Boy, think of the publicity hereafter when them pop-eyed tourists come swarmin' in to see the place where that fire-eater DeLong got scalped!"

"An' whilst you got an audience that a way," said Windy, his mustache bristling, "be sure you point out that big hide stretched on the wall. 'Sorry folks,' you can tell 'em. 'That there mangy pelt's kind of chawed up. You'll also note that the ears is missin'. But it was the best we could possibly do. It was all that was left of pore ol' Bull Morgan.'"

"Ho!" chuckled Flannigan. "Now there's a picture. But save some of that eloquence, hombre. You're gonna need it plenty. Strength to yore arm."

In a chair against the farther wall Windy lowered himself restfully, crossed one bony knee over the other, and pushed back his sombrero. To his right and left, other restful ones, becoming more alert, eyed each other with the complacence of those upon whom gods of chance have smiled. From here, unquestionably, a grand-stand view of the forthcoming imbroglio could be obtained.

For a while genial conversation roared on in the big room. Poker players dealt, discarded, drew, and placed their bets, their twinkling gaze on Windy. Spinning balls of ivory caromed one against the other and came to rest unheeded while players leaned on their cues, heads together. Thirsty ones slouched against the bar, facing toward the door.

These swinging portals opened presently, and Bull Morgan strode in.

The bulky cattle baron of the lower John Day was in excellent good spirits, it appeared. In his ponderous gait, as he moved forward through grinning ranks, was more than a suggestion of

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swagger. His roving glance instantly lighted on Windy and as he bore down upon him his small eyes glistened with the predatory interest of a bulldog that has sighted, in the immediate foreground, a particularly luscious and inviting steak.

But it was more than the sight of his ancient enemy that caught and riveted Windy's attention. Morgan was not traveling alone. Hard at his heels strode Attorney Jasper Fish, a lean-jawed, thin-lipped person known in the cattle country to be singularly adept at seeking out paths through apparently impenetrable legal entanglements. And behind Attorney Fish marched the visual embodiment of law, order, and the peace and dignity of Condon in the persons of the city marshal and his two downright deputies.

It was immediately revealed to Windy's glittering gaze that the waspish attorney and the three stolid peace officers represented, in gambling parlance, Morgan's four aces. But just what play his crafty enemy had planned, aided by his far more subtle legal ally, Jasper Fish, he could not imagine. He noted only, like a reconnoitering general studying the strength of opposing forces, that the three peace officers appeared to be somewhat ill at ease, as though, willy nilly, they had been forced into an enterprise whose official and legal purity failed to mask a dubious purpose.

The crowd made way for Morgan and his cohorts, and closed in instantly at the rear. Poker enthusiasts forsook their tables. Billiard players laid their cues softly down. Thirsty ones detached themselves from the bar. Throughout the big room there was a general movement toward the point where Windy sat with his back to the wall. When Morgan came to halt before that worthy, and his lieutenants ranged themselves at his side, the spectators, grinning and intent, formed a close-packed semicircle that arched out in unbroken front from wall to wall.

Masking his growing uneasiness beneath an appearance of outward calm, Windy shifted to a more comfortable position. With the utmost coolness and a species of sardonic amusement, he studied the opposing forces. Morgan stared back at him balefully, the attorney with tolerant blandness. The peace officers shifted uneasily beneath his gaze, and hunched their shoulders.

"Well, well," said Windy, at length, blowing a languid cloud of smoke upward. "This here looks like a war party an' no mistake. Sitting Bull an' his medicine men, huh?"

"Mr. Fish," said Morgan, with a studied politeness that instantly aroused Windy's animosity, "just so this—this upstandin' citizen don't have any chance to claim we sneaked up on him unawares, kindly give him the low-down, will you? In simple language, you savvy."

"So my limited mentality can grasp it," agreed Windy, nodding. "You're that thoughtful, Morgan."

"Not a-tall," said Morgan, spreading huge palms. "Of course not. No, indeed. Just so they's no misunderstanding, thass all."

"They's liable to be considerable of a misunderstandin' before we're all through," Windy prophesied. "But let's have it all in a bunch. If you're the gent who's goin' to do the talkin' for this noble monument, just you proceed with confidence, Mr. Fish. With the pop-eyed populace hangin' on yore every word, you're in a spot you've always yearned for. So make the most of it."

"Personalities," averred the attorney loftily, "are low-priced commodities in which we do not traffic. They represent mere impertinences and as such are beneath our notice." He cleared his throat and assumed his best courtroom pose, hands clasped behind him, chin de-

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pressed, brows bent. "You will do well, Mr. DeLong, to listen attentively to the points I am about to establish."

"I'm listenin'," growled Windy. "Establish yore said points pronto. Whenever you see me all busted out in a nervous rash this a way, it's a sign I'm battlin' an' overpowerin' yen to bite off somebody's ears. So make it snappy, brother."

"That irresponsible, impatient, and truculent point of view," said the attorney with severity, "is the crux of the present situation. I speak advisedly, Mr. DeLong, and I am sure that all these assembled witnesses will bear me out the assertion that you are of exceedingly short-tempered and irascible nature. It is likewise well established that your belligerent personality is revealed not only in action but in speech. This is borne out by the fact that you are familiarly known in this vicinity by the descriptive appellation of 'Windy!'

"Now, my dear sir, it appears that you have taken a particular and active dislike to my client, Mr. Morgan, an upstanding citizen and one of the leading cattlemen, landowners, and taxpayers of the county. It is a matter of local record, easily substantiated, that you have gone out of your way on numerous occasions to inflict mental and bodily humiliation upon him. This conduct on your part approximates the legal status of malicious persecution, and——"

"Whoa, counsellor!" Windy interrupted. "Get a tight rein on them blunderin' horses of eloquence for a second! I can't sling the king's English like you, feller, but let's get this straight. You ain't talkin' about a couple hombres that these assembled citizens don't know nothin' about, but Morgan an' DeLong. Now then, Morgan has got twenty square miles of land under fence and controls forty more of range. Right smack alongside of this empire, ol' Windy DeLong's got a flea-bitten quarter that runs mostly to jack rabbits an' sagebrush. Morgan's got a dozen wranglers on his pay roll, ships out his prime beef by the carload, lives in a castle, an' in power an influence is the great warty reptyle hereabouts. When it comes to shekels, he's got 'em. He's a general headin' an army of iron men. An' how does DeLong stack up? His beef wouldn't fill a box car 'less he threw in the whole calf crop. He lives in a shack, an' the only time he sees the inside of a bank is when he pays the interest on the mortgage. He's lucky if his profits for the year is represented by a thin slab of chawin' tobacco.

"Persecution?" he spoke with venomous force. "It is to laugh, hombre! I got a spring on my quarter. It's the only valuable thing on it. To get that spring, Morgan's tried to eucher me clean out of the county. He tried to buy me, an' bulldoze me, an' starve me. He tried to cloud the title to my homestead. He's done stole all the range to the south an' east, so my beef'll starve. In other words, he's tried to crush me continuous, an' when I wouldn't crush, he's done turned his hand to anything a-tall that would be likely to pester me into a frenzy. I had a warm-blooded colt that I thought a heap of, an' he tried to poison it. I got neighbors on the west, in whose good regard I set considerable store, an' he tried to poison their minds against me. He's pulled frame-up after frame-up, bettin' his bulgin' stack against my lowly hand, an' whilst I've licked him at every turn up to now—outguessed him, outbluffed him an' outslugged him—he's still a hound for punishment. Persecution?" He cast down his cigarette and ground it savagely beneath his heel. "I ain't got started yet. 'Less he lays off me, he'll figger he's never been nowhere nor seen nothin'!"

His bony fingers gripped the sides of his chair. It was as though, in-

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flamed by the memory of his wrongs, he was about to leap forthwith upon Morgan. The latter flinched a little back, paling, and cast an uneasy glance upon the peace officer. The crowd stood, motionless and silent. The suave attorney raised a well-manicured hand in a tolerant gesture.

"Tut, tut," he said, and his precise words were even more galling to Windy's heated mood. "Restraint, my dear sir, is an attribute of character you would do well to cultivate. We are not here for the purpose of discussing your past relations with Mr. Morgan. For any wrongs you may have suffered at his hands, real or imaginary, you have recourse in the courts. It is a method of redress open to all citizens. My client, being law-abiding and temperate, holding the statutes of the land in proper respect, has decided to stand upon his legal rights in the present instance. He has, therefore, sought the protection to which he is entitled."

"Protection? From what?"

"From your belligerence and animosity," said the attorney. "From your malicious persecution. He claims, and can support the contention, that he has been intimidated by you."

"Yeah?" said Windy. With an effort of will he forced his wrath into the background, and adopted the sardonic manner which he knew of old experience was most galling to Morgan. "Intimidated, huh?" He appraised the bulky Morgan with a glittering eye. "Now there's a picture!"

"Let me warn you," said the attorney, becoming more waspish as the spectators chuckled, "that you should speak with more discretion until you are fully informed of the consequences of ill-advised humor. This is the situation in a nutshell. My client, Mr. Morgan, desired to come to Condon this evening for the purpose of refreshment, pastime, and law-abiding recreation, the same being the right and privilege of all citizens. Yet he had cause to suspect, from past experience, that should he encounter you here, you might seize upon some pretext to assault him. Or, possibly, the assault might be made without the slightest vestige of excuse. He was dubious, therefore, about coming to town at all. And that, sir, is intimidation, a state of affairs, if you please, which is foreign to the spirit of that noble document under whose provisions we are guaranteed life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

"Bravo!" murmured Windy. "An' a brace of huzzahs! Well put, counselor. Don't nobody try to tell me that ain't eloquence. No question about it, this town's got to run you for dog-catcher. But what's all this got to do with the price of beef?"

"In his extremity," said the counselor, with a deprecatory shrug of the shoulders, "Mr. Morgan came to me. I decided to take up the cudgels in his behalf——"

"For a price," Windy agreed, nodding. "An' there's another example of swingin' the ol' iron men into action. With the kind of dough I got, I couldn't attract the attention of even a haywire lawyer."

"With this result," continued Attorney Fish, with a lofty disdain of his victim's barbed observations. "I have looked up your record. I find that you have become embroiled with local peace officers on a really astonishing number of occasions. You are, in fact, an habitual offender against the peace and dignity of Condon. The prosecuting attorney, I have reason to believe, will look with—er—marked disapproval upon any further lawbreaking activities in which you become embroiled. The court would, of course, take cognizance of your dubious record. You could not hope to escape, in short, with a mere fine; but would undoubtedly languish for a considerable period in our modern and commodious jail."

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"I get you," said Windy. "So you've done established yoreself for the evening as Mr. Morgan's guardian angel. You've fetched along these ace-high peace officers, who've got to do their duty regardless, to back yore play. If, in a moment of forgetfulness, I was to make a pass at the said Morgan, absent-mindedly figgerin' that his nose didn't suit his general type of beauty an' had ought to be moved farther around to the southwest, or that maybe his ears needed trimmin' just for percentage, I'd immediately be rushed by these noble sleuths an' throwed into the hoosegow, thereby enablin' justice to triumph an' permittin' the said Morgan to laugh himself plumb into hysterics. Is that it?"

"There is more, even, than that," said the counselor. "Crudely as you have expressed it, the half hasn't yet been told. Intent, at law, is the basis upon which crimes are judged. A felonious assault upon my client would bring immediate and disastrous consequences. But equally unfortunate, for you, would be the result if you directed to Mr. Morgan what might be deemed provocative words. Or, to express it in your own parlance, fighting talk. An insulting phrase, a menacing gesture, even, would be deemed sufficient warrant for the assumption that you intended bodily harm to my client. Under the circumstances, when you have been amply warned, it would be so construed."

"Lawsy!" breathed Windy. "You mean to say I can't even tell Morgan what I think of him? What th' Sam Hill's the country comin' to, anyway? Where's that free speech you lawyers are always hollerin' about?"

"Speech is only free," said the counselor, "when it does not affect the rights of others. In this instance, anything insulting, belittling, or provocative directed at Mr. Morgan would be considered an overt act. Or, in legal phraseology, what is well-known as, the casus belli."

"For instance," said Windy disbelievingly, "if I was to turn round to Little Bill Horn here"—he indicated a restful one at his right—"an' say to him: 'Bill, ol' son, you know what I think about Morgan? He's a big cheese, Bill. A disrep'table mountain of animated junk. Whichever way you go from Bull Morgan, they get better. Now ain't that the truth, Bill?' Would that be one of them casus bellies?"

"Just this once," said the counselor, with severity, "we'll let such language pass unnoticed. But any further remarks of that nature, made in Mr. Morgan's hearing and obviously designed for his information, can not help but be deemed malicious."

"Put it this way, then," insisted Windy stubbornly. "Suppose I was to say to Bill: 'Bill, ol' hoss, that there Morgan is a prince of a feller. They don't come no nobler. He's full of them ideals an' sentiments. Handsome feller, too. They's nobody ever goin' to mistake Bull Morgan for no wart-hawg, Bill. He's got that there presence you read about. An' when it comes to appraisin' Bull Morgan's appearance an' character, I'm the biggest liar in Gilliam County. You know that, Bill.' Now then, what's wrong with that?"

"I'll warn you once more," said the counselor venomously, "that no childish pretexts of that kind will be tolerated. The intent is the thing. Literally, my friend, in the presence of my client this evening, you must speak softly and with guarded tongue."

"Hot dawg!" averred Windy.

As the full impact of the dilemma in which he found himself registered at last upon his outraged sensibilities, he rolled a jaundiced eye about the grinning circle of spectators and silently reached for the makings.

It was plain at a glance that here was

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a situation cunningly designed to checkmate him at every turn. If, for example, he should yield to a yearning impulse to leap bodily and boldly upon the leering Morgan, the waiting peace officers, according to their sworn duty, would be compelled to lay forcible hands upon him, subdue him at any cost, and lead him away. In view of his previous dubious record in the local courts, as the waspish Fish had pointed out, this would inevitably mean jail sentence of proportions repugnant to a freedom-loving soul. Such a downright course of action, furthermore, would be playing directly into the vengeful Morgan's hands.

But the last straw, as it were, the final throttling of his spirit, was the fiendishly calculated assault upon the institution of free speech. Windy was capable of explosive action, as his dynamic record showed; but his venomous tongue also comprised a species of heavy artillery. It was a tried, trusted, and unfailing weapon upon which he was accustomed to lean in all crises ranging from the frivolous to the vital. In this instance, with his bulky enemy before him—smugly complacent, grinningly at ease—the maner in which he had been muzzled was maddening. Being unable to talk, in short, he was crippled, weaponless, impotent; a high explosive robbed of its power even to cause a detonation; a roaring lion stricken dumb.

Eying Morgan and his cohorts, his lean, saturnine features swollen with wrath, Windy's nimble thoughts vainly spurred hither and yon, seeking some means of escape from the humiliating jack pot. There was, it seemed, no escape. He was entrapped. That the grinning spectators had already analyzed the humorous aspects of the situation, and were extracting huge glee from the spectacle, was likewise plain.

"Fish," said Windy, at length, his voice all but hoarse with baffled fury, "since you seem to be the gent with the brass collar who tells the sun when to rise an' set hereabouts, leave me ask you something. As long as I deal in them said generalities, it's O. K. to speak above a whisper, huh?"

"If you exercise due caution," agreed the attorney, with the lofty air of conqueror conferring a favor upon the vanquished.

"Well, then," said Windy, "speakin' generally, I'm plumb fed up with the brand of neighbors I got at the minnit. You an' yore playmates can roll yore hoop elsewhere. I crave to set an' think."

But it became evident that the crafty counselor had planned still further excursions within the field of his client's statutory right. In fact, as Windy speedily sensed, the evening's program of legalized "goat-getting" had barely begun.

At Fish's curt gesture, restful ones deserted their chairs with haste. Into these vacant places, Morgan and the counselor lowered themselves with a sigh, the former at Windy's right, the latter at his left. Beyond the suave attorney, the three peace officers seated themselves without a word.

"This happens," said the attorney blandly, "to be a place of public amusement and refreshment, where neither caste nor class prevail. My client prefers to exercise his privileges by resting here for a space."

The very proximity of his enemy, planted cheerfully at his side, was maddening. Windy sat fairly quivering with rage.

"Chancing to meet you here was merely incidental," Fish explained. "This is one of the points of interest about town that Mr. Morgan wished to visit this evening. And a beautiful evening it is, eh, Morgan?"

"Wonderful," said Morgan, beaming upon the world at large. "Comin' into town, I dang near broke down an'

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warbled like a meadow-lark. Ever see a moon as purty? Made me think of the Widow Hogan, over to O'Hara's Springs. You know how it goes. A feller can't help but get to feelin' sentimental on a night like this——"

Windy leaped to his feet, bony hands clenched. Here, deliberately, it was plain, the bulky one had publicly referred to the major foundation stone of their undying enmity For the Widow Hogan, nearest neighbor to the west of his homestead, had smiled upon Windy. An unforgiven blow to Morgan's self-esteem had been the fact that his own wealth, power, and promise of material benefits had weighed as nothing in the scales of her favor. All his machinations, the wiliest schemes for the blasting of Windy's standing with the dark-eyed and smiling lady, had only served to establish that worthy the more firmly in her regard. In the matrimonial sweepstakes, as it were, he, Morgan, had been left at the post.

At this time and place, under the precise circumstances, mere mention of the lady's name caused Windy to see red.

"Fish," he said hoarsely, "they's a limit to all things. Who's being persecuted now? Is he askin' me to push his teeth clean through the back of his neck, or ain't he? Where's they a court that would stand for a gent bein' badgered like this?"

"Tut, tut," said the attorney. "Get your feelings in hand, Mr. DeLong. Nothing was further from my client's mind than to bruise your tender sensibilities. It's a well-known fact that he entertains the friendliest feelings toward the lady mentioned. There was nothing of malice intended in his chance remark. Your reaction is still another evidence of unreasonable and groundless belligerence toward Mr. Morgan. And on the other hand"—his careless gesture waved the trifling matter aside —"to demonstrate our fair-mindedness to all concerned, my client will be glad to refrain from any allusions that might be distressing. Kindly avoid the subject, if you please, Mr. Morgan. Confine your remarks to more general topics. Such, for example, as the hot winds that have been drying up the range, the price of hay, and the like."

"Bah!" growled Windy, turning on his heel.

Pulling his sombrero lower over his eyes, he strode toward the door. The grinning crowd opened up to let him pass. From the end of the bar, Flannigan beckoned with a crooked finger.

"Where's that hide, cowboy?" he whispered. "The mangy one, with the ears missin'."

"Don't you pay off no bets yet," said Windy between his teeth. "The night is but a pup."

On the street, head bowed, he turned his steps toward a lesser oasis known as the Cowboy's Rest. The place was all but deserted at the moment; and for this he was thankful. Meditation in solitude, he was sure, would produce a key to his problems.

"Make dust, cowboy," he told himself. "Oil up the ol' mental machinery. What you need right now is one of them great white lights. You aim to set twiddlin' yore thumbs whilst he hangs a frame-up like this on you? You won't be able to look folks in the eye again in this man's country. Get wild!"

He leaned on the bar in pensive pose, and immediately became aware that the proprietor, whom he held in low esteem, was eying him almost with affectionate regard. The reason for this phenomenon was revealed when a considerable crowd began to stream nonchalantly through the swinging doors. Wherever Windy was, it was obvious, a major proportion of the floating population was prepared to come to rest; and presently, through their ranks, came the grinning Morgan and his four aces.

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"Well, well," boomed the jovial cattle baron to his legal aid. "Once more this noble aggregation of neighbors an' friends had done forgathered. What'll it be, counselor?"

"Sa'sperilla," said the attorney, with a benign glance at Windy. "Won't you join us, Mr. DeLong?"

Windy turned and stalked away. He opened the swinging door with a vicious kick, and proceeded, muttering, down the street.

Ahead loomed the welcoming portals of the Hotel Condon. Except for a dozing night clerk, the spacious lobby was empty. Windy sank into the depths of a leather chair, tossed his cigarette away, and leaned back, eyes closed.

Straightway, it seemed, the lobby buzzed with traffic. Feet shuffled about him. Persons lowered themselves into adjacent chairs. From afar he heard Morgan's booming voice approaching. The pack was again on his trail.

He opened his eyes and cast a hunted look about him. On his left was "Little Bill" Horn; on his right Judge Brady of the Bar X. He felt vaguely heartened by the presence of these sterling old-timers, friends of long standing. Yet their moral support was useless to him now.

His glance roved above the thickening crowd that milled in the lobby. A broad stairway, across the big room, rose in a great sweep to upper realms. Immediately opposite the head of these stairs, on the upper hall, was a closed door; and as Windy studied this door, his speculative gaze became more intent.

He leaned over and whispered rapidly to Judge Brady. Grinning, that retired jurist nodded. Windy arose and strode to the desk. He was engaged in affixing his scrawling signature to the register just as Morgan and his cohorts arrived.

"Ha, counselor!" said Morgan, in triumph. "Shorely to goodness our good friend DeLong ain't retirin' for the night?"

"It does, indeed, appear so," said the attorney quite complacently. "That, of course, is his privilege. I only hope that nothing we have said or done has caused him to change his plans. And at the same time, Mr. Morgan, before he withdraws from the field, is it not fitting and proper that we should congratulate him on his remarkably docile and gentlemanly demeanor to-night? Is it possible that our well-meant efforts have contributed to this gratfying change of front?"

"Fish," said Windy, and ancient fires had lighted again in his glittering eye, "you'd be surprised at the brand of fruit yore said well-meant efforts has caused to sprout on the tree of knowledge. You've heard about that said worm that turned, huh? You're about to see one throwin' handsprings an' bellerin' like a wolf. Watch close now. Every li'l' movement has a meaning all its own. Are you an' yore big-hearted playmate Morgan set for the last act?"

"This has a mysterious sound," said the attorney, with a contemptuous smile. Yet his keen, malignant eyes were watchful. "Proceed, Mr. DeLong."

"Ol' hoss," said Windy, addressing Little Bill Horn, "an you, Judge Brady. An' Lem. An' Hank yonder. Just drag yoreselves up to Number 20." He indicated the room at the head of the stairs, which the night clerk had already opened, leaving the door ajar. "The five of us will have a li'l' poker session, away from the millin' crowds an' the said hoy polloy. Nickel ante and two-bit limit. Brethren, what a shambles it'll be! After you, gents."

The old-timers mentioned immediately moved forward, mounting the stair. Windy brought up the rear.

"An' citizens," continued the latter joyously, "what a flock of yarns I got to tell you when I get the muzzle off! About an overstuffed grandstander

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that's been bellerin' on my trail. A cringin' four-flusher that's as pestiferous as the hoof-an'-mouth disease." Midway on the stair, he turned to cast an appraising and lofty glance at Morgan. "Built somethin' like a summer squash, this feller I'm speakin' of. His eyes is too close together——"

"I warn you, sir," interposed the waspish attorney, bristling, "that these words, aimed at my client——"

"Sho!" said Windy, his benevolent glance roving over the spectators that now stood, close-packed, at the foot of the stair. "Shorely you don't think I'm referrin' to my big-hearted neighbor, Morgan? Tut, tut, Mr. Fish! The woods is full of handsome, upstandin' gents of them specifications."

The crowd guffawed. Morgan's malignant features purpled with wrath. The attorney merely compressed his thin lips, and waited.

"Inside, friends." Windy turned and waved his cronies into the room. "Something tells me we're gonna have an audience for these bedtime stories."

The spectators, chuckling, followed up the stair. With them, in the front rank, came Morgan and his lieutenants.

Room 20 had often been used for private sessions of the ancient American pastime. A table and chairs were in readiness beneath a low-hanging lamp. A rack of poker chips awaited, and new decks

The five seated themselves. Windy pushed back his hat and reached for the makings.

"Deal, Lem," he directed. "Jack pots, huh? An' whilst we're gettin' organized, I got a li'l' anecdote to unload that'll make yore whiskers curl. This bulgin' gent I was speakin' of come projectin' around one mornin' and——"

He pitched his voice in a lower key. His cronies leaned forward, grinning. Several of the spectators slid in unobstrusively and likewise craned their necks to listen. When the story was done, all straightened up, bellowing.

"Too bad you didn't hear that one, Fish," said Windy, beaming toward the door. "You'd have fallen apart in hunks an' gone crawlin' off with a laig under each arm. Lem, deal them cards."

The press of interested spectators forced Morgan and the attorney closer. The small room was now crowded. The marshal and deputies stood on the threshold. Grinning faces massed in the outer hall.

With his cards in his hand, Windy suddenly looked up over his shoulder. Morgan and his attorney were standing ominously at his side.

Whereupon Windy laid his cards softly down, pushed back his chair and rose to his feet. He stood thus, facing his enemies, thumbs hooked in his belt. The other players froze into immobility. The crowd suddenly grew very still.

"Fish," said Windy softly, "an' you, Morgan. Unfold yore ears. In what I aim to say now I'm going to name names. The time has come in this evening's festivities to call a spade a spade. But first"—he motioned to the crowd that massed in doorway and outer hall—"I'll ask you gents to open up an alley down the stairs. When I get through talkin', you savvy, I may have to make a run for it. It ain't often that I sprint away from grief. But when I do, gents an' others, I crave room."

The crowd obligingly split apart. Windy grinned upon his late tormentors.

"Morgan, ol' son," he said. "An' Mr. Fish. Foller me close. I come to town to-night with malice toward none. I was so full of them benevolent thoughts that my eyes was stickin' out. A fine large evenin' in prospect. Neighbors an' friends that a way. Saturday night in Condon! An' here you come, the pair of you, trailed by them noble peace

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officers, an' fell on me like wolves seekin' whom you might devour.

"Now then, Mr. Fish, the plain facts are, as the record will show, that not, at any time, have I ever gone out of my way to make trouble for yore client, Morgan. Like I said back to Flannigan's, he's been on my trail continuous—ever since I lit in this ace-high region, earnestly endeavorin' to push me clean out of the picture. All I ever craved from Mr. Morgan—all I ever hoped for—was to be let alone. The only time they's any fireworks between us is when he steps on my toes. The only times we ever staged a free-for-all was when he undertook to steal one of the few treasures I lay claim to.

"Just like to-night." He spoke with sudden force. "Who's doin' the persecutin'? Who arranged this frame-up for the sole purpose of makin' a horse-collar out of ol' Windy DeLong? Whose iron men are payin' for yore legal services, Fish, an' intimidatin' these peace officers into playin' his game? I'll leave it to any fair-minded gent in the crowd as to who's the lad that's battlin' against odds. Yeah, an' I'll——"

"One moment," interposed the attorney, "these forensics are interesting, of course. But just what point are you endeavoring to establish?"

"It's a hefty one," said Windy, his mustache bristling. "You crave to get down to the meat of it, huh? Fair enough. Morgan, I come to town tonight seekin' rest an' quiet. You an' Fish been trailin' me around until I done lost my temper. I'm feelin' plumb irritable an' peevish. Fact is, I'm downright hostile."

"Yeah?" said Morgan.

"Yes," said Windy. His bony left hand pointed the way. His voice was like the crack of a whip. "Get out! Both of you! Make dust, caballeros. Pronto!"

Morgan stared, jaw dropping. The attorney's thin lips parted. But his sardonic words were never uttered, for Windy's right hand swung from the hip and all but buried itself in Morgan's bulging midsection.

The cattle baron staggered back with an explosive grunt. Windy stepped forward and struck him again with such force as to send him reeling through the open door. With a series of impacts that seemed to shake the building, he crashed down the stairs, arms and legs waving.

Inflamed with the enthusiasm of the moment, Windy turned with a catlike movement and laid hold of the counselor. That spiteful one's nattily tailored body, fulcrumed across Windy's hip and shoulder, hurtled likewise through the door and rolled in lesser convolutions in Morgan's wake.

It had all happened with such explosive suddenness that the crowd stood paralyzed. The peace officer gaped down at the ruin below. Windy stood at the head of the stair, calmly dusting his hands.

Then a great hubbub arose. The lobby shook with laughter and cheers. Morgan reared up, incapable of speech, and gasping. The waspish counselor was all but foaming at the mouth with rage and wounded dignity.

"Arrest that man!" he shouted, pointing a quivering finger at Windy. "It's an unprovoked assault and he'll pay for it. Arrest him quick, I tell you!"

But even as the marshal and deputies stepped obediently forward, Windy raised a restraining hand.

"Just a second, Mr. Marshal," he said. "Hold everything."

"No quibbling!" raved the attorney. "Let him do his debating in court. Arrest him!"

"Key down!" said Windy harshly. "Or the air's liable to be full of flyin' Fishes. I likewise got legal authority." He crooked his finger at Judge Brady,

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who instantly took his place as his side. "How about it, judge?"

"I am no longer in active practice," said that old-timer, with a studious attempt at gravity. "Yet I recall certain legal principles that are unassailable. It is my opinion that Mr. DeLong was within his rights."

"Rights?" snarled the counselor. "What nonsense is this?"

"You didn't know I had any rights, eh, Fish?" said Windy. "Well, sir, I'd done paid my room rent. An' that—but you tell 'em, judge."

"You and Mr. Morgan were trespassers," said the judge. "He ordered you out. You did not go. He was justified in using force to back up his demand. The room was not public. It was his temporary home."

"An' a gent's home is his castle," said Windy, with a lofty air that convulsed the spectators. "The wind can blow through it. The rain can beat in it. But polecats can't enter. Fish, you've overplayed yore hand. Go ahead an' insist on an arrest if you feel that a way. I've done got an attorney also, eh, judge?"

"I am still a member of the bar," said the judge, nodding. "It will be a pleasure to appear for you in this case, Mr. DeLong; before the supreme court, if necessary."

"We'll see about this," snarled Attorney Fish, with a darting, venomous glance at the grinning crowd. "Fetch him over to the recorder's office. We'll swear out a complaint and do our talking in court."

"I'll come peaceable," said Windy. "I likewise got a complaint or two to swear at. Get yore bail money ready, Morgan."

But when, escorted by the marshal and followed by the crowd, Windy and his cronies arrived at the courthouse, it was found that Morgan and the counselor were not numbered among those present. They had, it was apparent, made a virtue of necessity in the business of "saving face" by beating a strategic retreat. In the absence of complaining witnesses, no charge was lodged against Windy; and that worthy, as a magnanimous gesture, announced that he would likewise refrain from legal action against his routed enemies.

Thus the incident was closed. A carnival spirit again winged forth upon Main Street. The moon rode high in the heavens and the night was but a pup. Friends of DeLong made up the genial army that bore down on Flannigan's like a thundering herd. Others had already lost themselves in the milling tides.

Among the former, Windy strode, chest thrown out, mustache bristling.

"Ol' son," he told Little Bill Horn, "skin over to the hotel an' inform the proprietor that I won't be usin' that room to-night. If he refunds my two bucks we'll put it into the next jack pot. You, Lem, sprint down to Flannigan's. Tell him to pay off all bets an' hold a poker table for us. Look wild, citizens! Something tells me they's whiskers goin' to get trimmed. Lady Luck's standin' at my side."

CERTIFIED SEED INDUSTRY

ONE of the new big industries of the Western mountain States is the producing of certified seeds. Potatoes, grain, and all vegetable seeds that are grown at an altitude in the clean, rich lands of the West are free from disease and have extreme vitality. The demand for these seeds is growing every day. All sections of the country want them. Growers are well paid for their labors as these seeds are worth more than seeds grown in other sections and buyers gladly pay the extra price.

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Pioneer Towns of the West

(Camp Verde, Arizona)

By Duane Clark

WHILE the population of Camp Verde is still numbered in the hundreds, it is filled with color, and atmosphere, and fascinating history. Camp Verde was settled not long after Prescott was founded. It is forty-two miles east of this already thriving city. A mere handful of men decided that somewhere along the Verde River, which was then called the San Francisco River, would be an ideal spot to locate. At that time the river was scarcely more than two feet deep, although it was fifty feet in width. It was largely filled in with moss and weeds. Three days after leaving Prescott, the men and one horse waded the river and camped on the east side. It was midwinter, but there was a breath of spring in the air, and the black gama grass looked more inviting than the snows of Prescott.

The next few days were spent exploring that section of the country and it was decided to settle between the Verde River and Clear Creek. The pioneers of that day always had to consider the possibility of Indian attacks, and every community was settled with this thought in mind. Water could be brought from Clear Creek for irrigation purposes, so with high hopes the little party returned to their native city with news of their enterprise. They were met with little encouragement, but this did not deter them. Early in February, 1865, nineteen of them set out with six ox-drawn wagons filled with supplies and necessities. By May, more than two hundred acres had been planted with barley, wheat, corn, potatoes, and small garden vegetables. The first crop of barley was brought to Prescott in August. It was not very good, for it was short and had been pulled like flax instead of cut. There was dirt in it because it had been trampled by oxen on dirt floors, while the chaff was separated from the grain by a man standing on a stool and pouring the grain to the ground, depending upon the wind to blow the light chaff away. The method

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was most crude and the results were poor. The owners had a hard time disposing of it in Prescott for the dealers there could buy better grain from San Francisco.

But the settlers worked hard and gradually things improved. The Indians stole both grain and cattle, but after the establishment of government troops the danger of attack was lessened. Camp Lincoln was an added protection against the Apaches east of the river. In 1865, Arizona was transferred from the Department of New Mexico to the Department of California. Indians still troubled the Camp Verde pioneers and many battles were fought. Camp Verde did not really become of any importance until 1870, when the government built the Cherry Creek road. A few buildings were erected then and several more the following year. In 1871, a reservation was established at Camp Verde for the Indians, who were half starved since the white men had taken much of their farming land from them. The Apaches were put to work building an irrigation ditch which was five miles long, four feet across, and three feet deep. Later, the Indians were removed from the reservaton to another location. More trouble ensued, for the red men were satisfied to remain at Camp Verde and took exception to being buffeted about.

The country surrounding Camp Verde is one of the richest and finest cattle ranges in the State. Camp Verde to-day is at the junction of two splendid highways which lead to Phoenix, Flagstaff, and Prescott. A sodium sulphate mine produces sixty-five carloads per month. There are traces of potassium salts, and a great future is predicted for Camp Verde. Near the town are the Montezuma Castle and Well. Relics are constantly being taken out of the salt mines. Stone tools have been found which indicate habitation of a much earlier day than when the brave spirits of Prescott gave up the comparative comforts of home to develop a new country. More than one perfectly preserved Indian body has been excavated. Woven bits of cloth, torches, Indian sandals made of a peculiar fiber, and wood which does not resemble any of the known species of to-day have been found.

Captain Smiley, the Indian who is said to have captured Geronimo, that famous outlaw, lives in a tiny Indian village at the edge of Camp Verde. Farming and cattle raising are still the two most important occupations, although the mines are continually drawing new people to settle there. The prospect of undiscovered mines is always a lure to adventurous men and women. Truck farming and fruit growing are increasing in productivity. There are many beauty spots well worth visiting in and around Camp Verde.

There is a fine grammar school, a high school, churches, and a number of stores. Some of the original buildings still stand as a reminder of those early, hazardous days which taxed every bit of courage the inhabitants possessed.

SAND-DUNE SKIING

SOME one has discovered a new sport. It is sand-dune skiing. Regular snow skiis are used and the devotee slides down sand dunes instead of snow slides. Those who have tried it claim that the sand has little effect on the skiis and that it is fully as exciting as snow skiing, only not so cold.

The large sand dunes twenty miles east of Mosca and thirty miles northeast of Alamosa, Colorado, have many available one-hundred-and-fifty-foot slides where good jumps would be possible. Sportsmen have been trying out this new idea and it is believed that sand skiing will soon become a very popular pastime.

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Bark Peelers And Strategy

By Howard J. Perry

Author of "Fighting Code," etc.

DISGUST was etched on the weathered faces of the group of Big Bear loggers lounging in front of the bunk house as they listened to the words of Joe Ballard, a rangy hooktender.

"You ain't kiddin' us, Joe?" inquired "Spike" Millard, the raw-boned foreman of the outfit.

Joe flung him a look of injured pride. "Me kiddin'?" he exploded. "Why in heck you figger I'd want to kid you fellows? I tell you, it's the truth. I got it straight down at the junction, last night."

"Well, what I want to know, who is this Larry Dillon, anyways?" interjected Eddy Gaines, a solidly built individual with a thick pair of shoulders. "The way you fellows act, he must be poison."

"If you'd been in this neck of the woods a year ago you'd know who he was," declared Spike. "But seein' as how you're a newcomer, maybe we ought to tell you."

"Sure, let me in on the low-down," Eddy encouraged.

Spike drew a plug of tobacco from his pocket and bit off a corner. For a few seconds he chewed on it reflectively.

"In the first place, he ain't no good," he then began. "Him an' his dad came up here an' settled in the valley. They was a couple of bark peelers."

"Bark peelers?" inquired Eddy. "What's them?"

Spike favored him with a look of disdain. "Gosh, Eddy, it's plain you ain't been in the big timber very long! A bark peeler is—well, a bark peeler is just that. They skin the bark from cascara trees an' sell it."

Eddy nodded his head comprehendingly. "Yeah, I get you now."

"An' there ain't no one never heard no good about any of 'em," Spike con-

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tinued. "This here Dillon kid an' his dad hung around Big Bear Valley for some time. They was cuttin' bark along the river when I wanted to run a track line through their stuff. They tried to stop me an' darn near got away with it, until——" Here Spike winked slyly at the group. "Well, until a fire accidentally started down there one night an' burned 'em out. They didn't have any more bark to cut, so they had to beat it."

Eddy grinned. "Accidentally, huh?"

Spike chuckled and nodded. "Yep. A very fortunate accident, but we got that road through the bottom, though the kid tried to lay the blame on me."

"An' of course you didn't set the fire, did you?" Eddy questioned.

Spike did not answer, but the others laughed.

"An' now he's comin' back up here?" Eddy went on, turning to Joe Ballard. "An' did I hear you say he's been 'pointed deputy for this section?"

"That's the straight of it," Joe assured. "Seems that the sheriff figures we ain't capable of keepin' the peace in this valley just 'cause Seth Ragus has been raisin' a bunch of trouble."

"Yeah," snorted Spike. "Think of sendin' that punk kid up here to stop a guy like Seth! Why, that man will tear him to pieces an' feed him to the crows if he comes snoopin' around. 'Course, Seth has been shootin' up things an' robbin' a few of the settlers; but he ain't harmed us, an' the dang settlers ought to be driven out, anyways."

"All except Bob Covington an' his daughter, huh, Spike?" Joe asked with a taunting grin.

Spike colored. His feelings toward Jean Covington were no secret in the Big Bear camp.

"Well, I guess there's exceptions to all rules," he muttered. "Bob ain't a bad feller, an' he minds his own business."

"An' you might as well add, Jean is the prettiest girl who ever lived in the Big Bear," Joe continued. "Which reminds me, you ain't heard all my story. It was Bob who told me young Dillon was comin' back. An' here's some more good news for you, Spike. Unfold your ears an' listen." He paused, evidently enjoying the import of his next revelation. "Bob told me Dillon is goin' to stay at his house."

Spike Millard started as though he had been suddenly prodded with a hot iron. A black look leaped into his ferretlike eyes.

"You're lyin', Joe!" he cried.

"Never was more truthful in my life," the other replied blandly. "An' knowin' how Dillon used to hang around Jean when you weren't there, I figgered you'd appreciate my tellin' you this."

Eddy Gaines whistled softly. "So that's the way the wind blows. Maybe that fire wasn't accidental."

Spike whirled on him with an oath. "You shut up, or I'll crack you one. Jean Covington ain't to be brought into this. Dillon's a no-'count bark peeler, an' I ain't goin' to have our reputation smirched by every one thinkin' we got to have the likes of him comin' up here to help us keep the law."

"You're darn tootin', Spike," Joe agreed. "That's why I'm tellin' you this now. It's a disgrace, that's what it is. But what we goin' to do about it?"

Spike's eyes glinted menacingly. "Well, we'll do somethin', all right," he growled. "An' I guess you fellers are behind me in anything that's done, ain't you?" He swung a questioning look over the group.

Every man present nodded.

"Sure," declared Joe. "We got a reputation to uphold, an' we ain't goin' to have it spoiled."

"Well, then, you leave it to me," said Spike. He turned on Eddy. "Come with me. I got an idea already." He

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strode toward the commissary, followed by the surprised Eddy.

When they were inside, Spike closed the door. "Listen, Gaines," he began, "you told me one time you had done some sorta actin' once. Ain't that right?"

Eddy nodded. "Well, I used to take a few parts when I was a kid. Why?"

"Did you ever see Seth Ragus?" Spike continued, without answering the other's question."

"Sure, a couple of times."

"He's about your size, ain't he, with the same color hair?"

"Yep, just about," Eddy replied, his face still puckered into a puzzle. "What you drivin' at, anyways?'

"Just this," said Spike. "I know of an old cabin up on Cedar Creek where Seth hangs out occasional. He ain't there now, an' he won't be for some time. All you got to do is to dress like him an' go up to that shack. He always wears an old gray shirt an' faded overalls. We'll get word to this kid that Seth is roamin' around there. He'll come up, an' when he does, you beat him good; but, in the end, let him capture you. When he gets back to the jail at the junction with you, we'll be there to give him the horse laugh."

Eddy's face lit with comprehension. "Gosh, Spike, do you think I could fool him?"

"Heck, he's dumb!" retorted the other. "Besides, Ragus wasn't around when he was. Get a long black mustache an' you'll look like Seth's twin."

"But what about lickin' him?" inquired Eddy.

"That'll be easy. He's nothin' but a punk youngster without any size. He'll probably have a gun, but you can work it so he can't use it. You'll have the advantage of expectin' him. But, remember, I want him licked pretty darn good 'fore you give in. An' if you do it right, I'll make you a present of twenty dollars."

"Sold," declared Eddy. "I'd almost kiss the bullcook for twenty bucks."

"But no missin' fire on this," warned Spike. "I want to pull the big laugh on him in front of everybody. That'll make him crawl away an' not come back here again."

"An' leave the girl for you," Eddy grinned, at the same time ducking his head.

Spike's fist had come up, but he did not strike. "You mind your own business about the girl. All you have to do is fool this feller."

"For twenty bucks? Boy, I'd fool my own grandmother!"

"Then get busy," ordered Spike. "That Dillon kid will be moochin' up this way soon now."

At that particular moment Larry Dillon had paused on the trail where it broke through the timber and rounded a sharp bluff that commanded an expansive view of Big Bear Valley. Pushing back his hat, he wiped the drops from his forehead and permitted his blue eyes to wander over the panorama before him. Then a wistful smile played across his boyish face.

"Dog-gone!" he said aloud. "This is sure a pretty place, and I'm right glad to be coming back." His eyes came to rest on a small cluster of buildings nestled in a tiny clearing to his left, and his heart took a sudden spurt. The Covington homestead had not changed much in the year he had been gone. A sudden movement of pink among the hollyhocks aroused him with a start. Adjusting his hat, he strode quickly down the trail.

Ten minutes later, as he approached the cabin, he realized that he had not been mistaken in the flash of pink. Jean Covington stood there now, gathering flowers. Her back was toward him and it was not until he was within a few feet of her that she became aware of his approach. Then she whirled with a

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little frightened gesture. But the moment her eyes fell on him a smile of welcome appeared on her face.

"Larry!" she exclaimed, coming forward and extending a brown hand, which he took eagerly. "I'm so glad you're here."

"And maybe you think I ain't!" he responded. "I never knew a place could look so good as Big Bear Valley."

"We've been expecting you," Jean said. "And to think that you've come back as a deputy sheriff."

"Yep, that is rather nice," he admitted. "Especially after being burned out of here once. It's a good joke on the boys at the camp. A no-account bark peeler now a deputy sheriff."

The girl's face clouded. "I don't think they will consider it much of a joke, Larry; and you probably won't get any coöperation from them."

"I'm not expecting any." His lips were tight and his youthful countenance took on an older expression. "They'll more'n likely be hoping I'll fail at the job."

"Dad told me you had been ordered to arrest Seth Ragus," she said. "He's a notoriously tough character."

"That's what they say, but I guess a fellow in this business has to be prepared to meet up with tough characters. Besides, my job depends on getting this Ragus guy. If I don't, I'm as good as fired. The sheriff put it up to me just that way. And I need this job, Jean, for several reasons." He watched her closely and the flush that stole into her cheeks told him that the significance of his words had not escaped her.

"Right now you need some supper," she laughed. "It's all ready, and dad will be here soon."

As they turned to the house, Larry observed two men approaching. One, he saw, was Bob Covington, and the other Spike Willard. Jean's father recognized him while still some distance away and he hurried forward.

"Hello, Larry," he greeted. "I'm sure glad to see the new deputy sheriff. How are you?" He stuck out his hand.

"Fine," Dillon responded. The old man's grip was like iron and Larry felt in it a genuine welcome.

Covington turned to Millard, who was going past the cabin.

"Hey, Spike," he called. "Better come in and have some grub with us."

"Not this time," the other answered. "I've got important business at camp." He smiled at Jean but only gave Larry an icy look as he went on up the trail.

For a moment the young man stared after him. The sight of the foreman recalled bitter memories of those days on the river bottom when he and his father had endeavored to wrest a living from the lowly task of bark peeling. That fire and the subsequent loss of everything had not been considered accidental by Larry. There had been too many evidences of the feeling Spike Millard and his companions had held against him, although he was certain that, had it not been for his interest in Jean, their animosity would never have been carried to the extent of burning him out.

Grimly Larry's gaze followed the retreating figure of the big foreman. He had a chance now to make good before the eyes of Spike and Jean. He had overruled the grave doubt manifested by the sheriff when he had applied for the position of deputy in the Big Bear Valley. The sheriff had as much as told him that he seriously doubted that a slender youth, whose very presence would be resented by a majority of the residents, could hold the job.

A light pressure on his arm interrupted his thoughts. Jean had stepped close to him.

"Come on in, Larry," she said. "You must be hungry."

"You bet I am," he replied. "I haven't had anything to eat since this morning."

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"Then there's two of us," laughed the father.

They went into the house and while they were washing Jean laid the food on the table. During the meal the two plied Larry with many questions of what his life had been since he had gone away.

He told them of his ever-present desire to return to Big Bear Valley, and how he had pleaded with the sheriff for the appointment until that weathered old officer had finally consented.

"I guess it was the old man's desire to put this fellow Seth Ragus behind the bars that made him let me have the chance," said Larry. "It seems Ragus has been boasting that no law is going to lay hold of him."

"Well," said Covington after a moment's thought, "he's a real bad egg, and I ain't so certain but he has some ground for that statement. Don't you think you're tackling a pretty big contract when you start out for him?"

"I don't expect him to greet me like a brother," Larry replied. "But worse crooks than he have been taken to jail."

"It sure would be a dog-gone good thing for the valley to get rid of him," Covington stated. "He's been raising Cain up here. Running in bad liquor to the camps and robbing the settlers. Charley Harris, owner of the Big Bear outfit, told me once he would give a thousand dollars to see Seth behind the bars. But my contention is that there must be some one else in the camps who's playing along with that crook."

"Larry, you're not going to take any unnecessary chances, are you?" the girl asked, her eyes disclosing her concern.

"Jean, this whole affair is necessary," the young man replied gravely. "It might be risky, but it's a most important job to me."

They had finished eating and Covington started for the porch, filling his pipe as he went. Larry complied with his host's request to follow him, although he would have preferred to remain with Jean.

Purple shadows had filled the valley, and the distant serrated peaks of the mountains were dressed in the crimson robes of the setting sun. Overhead a night hawk wheeled and screamed through the deepening twilight.

The two men sat and talked for some time before Jean came out and took her place on the steps below them. The conversation drifted into various channels until Bob Covington's head began to droop toward his chest. Larry was about to take a seat beside the girl when a figure appeared out of the gloom and approached the house. When it drew near, he made out the form of a youth dressed in logger's clothes.

"Is the new deputy here?" the youngster asked as he came up.

"I'm he," Larry answered. "What's on your mind?"

"They sent me down to tell you Seth Ragus is hangin' out in that old cabin up on Cedar Creek."

Larry sat up. He heard Covington wake with a snort, and he thought he detected Jean breathing sharply.

"Who sent you?" he demanded.

"It—it was one of the settlers," the boy replied. "He said you had come here to get Seth. Told me to tell you to be there about dawn to-morrow mornin' an' you'd have a better chance to take him." He started away.

"Thanks, son," Larry said. "I appreciate the tip."

"That's all right, mister," The boy appeared to be eager to leave, and a moment later was lost in the darkness.

"Well, that sounds as if I've been handed a break," Larry said with a laugh.

Covington grunted. "Yeah, but don't go counting your chickens too soon. Knowing where Ragus is and getting him is two different things."

"Are you going up there, Larry?" Jean asked in a strained voice.

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"Sure I am, Jean," he replied. "It looks like things have come my way for once."

Bob Covington got to his feet. "Listen, boy," he said, "I know there ain't much use warning a youngster. They got to learn by experience; but if I was you, I'd be dog-gone careful in handling this fellow. He'd as soon plug you as not."

"Oh, I'll be careful," Larry assured. "I'll go up just before dawn and not give him a chance to get the drop on me."

"Then you'd better take that roan mare of mine out in the barn. It's quite a ways and Seth's never without his horse."

"Gosh, that would be great," said Larry. "Are you sure that you won't need it?"

"No, Jean has her own nag and I'll not be going out of the valley to-morrow."

Covington went on into the house and Larry turned to the girl.

"How'd you like to ride in to the junction to-morrow morning?" he asked importantly.

"Why?"

"Well, I figure I'll be bringing Ragus in some time in the morning. I already have the key to the jail."

The girl looked up at him. "Larry, you certainly have all the confidence in the world."

"I've got to have," he said. "Besides, if I don't see him, I'll be going in to report by 'phone to the chief that I've heard of him, anyways. And we can ride back together. Will you be there?"

She nodded and moved closer to him. In the darkness, his hand found hers and a thrill shot through him as he felt the warm pressure of her fingers. Yet he realized that this was not the time to declare his love. He had to make good on his mission first. Together they went into the house.

Covington came toward them with an alarm clock.

"You'll be needing this to wake you up in time. I've set it for four, which will give you time to get to Cedar Creek before daybreak."

Larry took the clock and hastened to bed. It seemed that he had hardly fallen asleep before he was roused by the alarm. Dressing quickly, he slipped from the house and out to the barn where he saddled the horse. He lost no time in getting on his way. The location of Cedar Creek and the cabin were clear to him. He had come across them a year before when he was searching for cascara trees in that vicinity.

Crimson pennants were being flung against the eastern horizon as Larry turned up the last section of the trail. It was rough and irregular from little travel; he found it necessary to pick his way with care. After a short distance of this course, he suddenly made out the outline of the cabin set on a ledge a hundred yards above.

Dismounting, he went nearer, leading his horse until he came to a clump of second-growth cedars. Picketing the animal in the midst of their thick foliage, he proceeded on foot.

His heart beat fast. If Ragus were in that cabin and he could move up without the other's knowing of his presence, the rest would be easy. Yet, as he began his stealthy approach, there burst over him the realization he was about to deal with a man who was every bit as vicious as his reputation.

Ascending the stiff slope, Larry kept under cover of every available object until he was within a few yards of the building. Then he paused and adjusted his holster. There was something distinctly comforting in the feel of his weapon, yet he knew that in case of a quick draw, he stood little chance against Ragus.

No sign of life stirred about the place. Daylight was stronger now, and drop-

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ping to his hands and knees he began to crawl forward. When he had arrived beneath one of the tiny windows, he drew himself up slowly, until his eyes were on a level with the opening. He wanted to see the interior of the structure, so that if Ragus were in there he would know how to come upon him without detection.

Just as Larry was on the point of looking in, there was a sudden quick movement behind him. Before he had a chance to turn, the impact of a human body sent him sprawling on his face. Almost at the same moment, he felt his gun yanked from its holster.

Larry hit the ground with a lurching roll that carried him several yards; and the next instant he was on his feet again. Whirling, he braced himself for a second attack, but it did not come. Instead, some fifteen feet away, he saw a swarthy, heavy-shouldered man with grimy face and long black mustache, glaring at him.

In that instantaneous appraisal Larry noticed that the other was unarmed. At the man's feet lay his own gun. Momentarily he was too surprised to move. There was no doubt in his mind that this man before him was Seth Ragus. His appearance tallied exactly with the description given him by the sheriff. But he had been led to believe that Ragus was a desperate man when faced by the law, a crook who would shoot first and argue afterward. Yet the other had no weapon, and he made no move to pick up the gun he had wrested from the deputy.

While these thoughts were flashing through Larry's brain, the newcomer stepped toward him.

"Well, you tinhorn deputy," he snarled. "What I ought to do is to plug you full of lead, but it would be a shame to muss up a baby that way. Instead, I aim to give you a beatin' an' send you back where you came from."

Still too surprised to answer, Larry continued to stare at the other. He was a big fellow, much larger than the young man expected, and as he advanced there was no denying the fact that he intended to carry out his threat.

Bracing himelf, Larry waited. The big man's words had stung him. He pictured the humiliation that would be his, in case he returned minus his prisoner; yet with marked evidence that he had been outclassed by him.

With clenched fists, Ragus stepped nearer. Larry watched him closely. There was no hope of standing up and trading blow for blow with this man. He would have to rely on different methods.

Suddenly, with a lunge, the other's fist shot out. Larry saw the blow coming, and he ducked; but in so doing, he placed himself in a vulnerable position. Quick to notice it, Ragus brought his second fist into play with a terrific uppercut. It caught Larry flush on the jaw and his feet went out from under him. He was on his back the next instant, his head spinning, and his senses unbalanced.

Instead of following up his advantage, Ragus stepped back and laughed gloatingly, maddeningly. Dazed and bleeding, Larry got to his feet, his rage swelling under the lash of that laugh. A surge of blinding fury seized him.

With a leap, he was upon his assailant. The attack was so sudden that Ragus was taken unaware. Before he could prepare himself, Larry had struck out. His knuckles landed square in that grinning mouth. Throwing all caution aside, he put every particle of his strength into his blows.

Ragus retreated under the assault in an effort to get set, but Larry followed him. Once more the other leaped away, but this time his heel caught and he went over backward. Carried by the momentum of his attack, Larry crushed down upon him. He was up again in a moment, but Ragus lay where

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he had fallen, eyes closed and mouth hanging open.

For an instant, Larry stared in amazement at the sudden turn the fight had taken and then he observed that the man's head had struck on a jagged rock. Without waiting, he ran around to the door of the cabin and went in. There he found a section of rope; he took it and ran back again. It was only a matter of a few minutes before he had bound the unconscious man's wrists and ankles. Replacing the gun in his holster, he hurried on down to the trail below.

If Ragus remained unconscious he would have to transport him to town on the horse. A feeling of exultation swept over him. In less than twenty-four hours after he had come into Big Bear Valley, he had captured the desperado. His job was secure. Would Jean be at the junction when he arrived? He hoped so. With the deputyship assured, he could ask her the important question.

Arriving at the clump of cedars he was untying his horse when an idea occurred to him. Covington had said Ragus possessed a mount of his own. If he could locate it he would be able to take his prisoner in much more easily. No doubt, the animal was concealed somewhere in the vicinity. At least he would have a look about. But first he moved around his own horse to tighten the cinch. As he stooped down, a metallic click sounded behind him. Whirling about, a gasp of astonishment brushed past his lips.

Standing not ten feet away was Seth Ragus. In his hands he held a rifle, and Larry noted that it was cocked, with its muzzle bearing on his mid-section.

Had the mountain above suddenly crashed upon him, Larry could not have experienced a greater shock. For an instant he stared, with mouth agape. The situation was incomprehensible. He knew he had securely bound his prisoner, yet here he stood before him as though he had leaped out of thin air, the product of invisible magic.

Inwardly the agony of despair seared his heart. Just when he was certain of success, he found that success denied. Ragus had stepped forward, his gun held at a menacing angle.

"Reach for the treetops, kid!" he ordered.

Larry's hands went up. There was a large degree of reluctance in the movement. His first surprise had suddenly given way to a wave of bitterness. Even as he obeyed the other's command a strong desire to hurl himself at Ragus seized him. It would be almost a suicidal act; but somehow death at that moment did not appear so terrible as the humiliation of defeat. Why had he not been more careful in binding the man when he had him? But even though he was standing in plain view, he could propound no reasonable explanation of how he had escaped.

Ragus glared at him out of a pair of black eyes, hot with hatred.

"So you figgered you'd take a chance on comin' up here snoopin' around, huh?" he asked. "Well, when I'm through with you, you won't feel like makin' a return visit."

He came closer. Larry knew he was going to disarm him. He was glad the other had a rifle. If there were ever going to be an opportunity, it was now. He permitted an expression of fear to distort his countenance.

Ragus saw it and grinned. "Yeller, ain't you? I thought you was."

Holding his gun in one hand, he reached for Larry's holster. It was a quickly executed movement, but as his hand shot out Larry's fists knotted and he brought both of them down on the man's head. It was a desperate chance he was taking, and in the following split second several things happened. As Larry's blow started, Ragus brought

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his rifle up; but he was inches too close, and the barrel caught on the young man's shirt. There was a roar as the gun went off and Larry felt a sharp stab in his side.

At the same instant his horse, terrified, lurched, striking the deputy and throwing him forward almost on top of Ragus. With a flash, Larry saw his opportunity. His fists had knocked the desperado nearly to his knees, and before the other could recover his balance, he was upon him.

They both went down, Ragus struggling with his powerful arms to throw off his assailant, and Larry knowing that if he were to overcome the big man it would have to be in those first few minutes. Driving his knee into the man's abdomen he slammed his body back on the ground and whipped out his gun. Before Ragus could make another move, Larry had the weapon planted in the middle of his stomach.

"One more wriggle, Ragus and it'll be all over," he cried, jabbing the muzzle a few inches deeper as a reminder.

The man's body relaxed, and Larry got to his feet. But not for an instant did he take his eyes off the other. This time he would make no mistake. Picking up the rifle, he tossed it aside.

"Get up!" he commanded. "And don't figure I won't shoot at the first wrong move."

Apparently, Ragus was convinced by the determination in his eyes, for he rose sullenly from the ground. In the excitement, Larry's horse had run out onto the trail. There he had stopped, and as the deputy looked, he saw another saddled animal a hundred yards farther on.

"That your horse, Ragus?" he asked.

The other nodded morosely. "What the heck you think it is? A jack rabbit?"

Larry ignored the words, and jerked his head toward the trail. "Get out there!"

Ragus went, with Larry close behind. When they came up to the young man's mount, he moved around and unfastened a rope that hung from the saddle, his eyes and gun never leaving Ragus. In another few moments he had the other's hands tied behind him. Then, shoving his gun into the holster, he took his horse and moved with his prisoner onto the second animal. Ordering the man to mount, he proceeded to do likewise.

"Now, listen," he instructed, "one false move and I'll shoot first and talk afterward. We're going to the junction. And being polite as well as cautious, I'm going to let you go ahead. Get moving!"

They filed down the trail, Ragus staring straight ahead and Larry absorbed in his own conjecturings. His narrow escape had taken much of the exuberance out of him. How Ragus had got loose from his bounds disturbed as well as puzzled the young man. Now he could feel no measure of safety until he had delivered him into the hands of the sheriff.

It was a two-hours' ride to the settlement and Larry harbored a distinct sense of relief when he saw the weathered buildings of the junction loom up. He had examined his wound and found the bullet had only grazed the skin.

As they came into the town, he spurred his horse ahead and took the reins of Ragus's mount. Following a circuitous course, they reached the log building that served as the jail. There was no one about when they rode up, but as he dismounted, a group of loggers at a distance started toward them.

In a few moments he had his prisoner inside and had just come out again when the loggers arrived. He was surprised at the number. It seemed that most of the Big Bear camp was in town. Leading them was Spike Millard. Turning the key in the lock, Larry faced the men.

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Millard was grinning. "Well, deputy, did you get your man?" he asked.

Larry nodded. "I got what I came after, Millard," he retorted. There was something in the other's smirking face that angered him.

By this time, others were gathering, and Larry saw Jean approaching, accompanied by a stranger dressed in a business suit. Her face was beaming.

"So you got the desperate Seth Ragus, huh?" Spike went on.

Larry looked at him resentfully. "Why all the curiosity, Millard? Is he a friend of yours?"

"Well, you see I'm lookin' for one of my men who went up Cedar Creek yesterday for me. He ain't come back, an' I figgered maybe you'd seen him."

"Well, I haven't," Larry replied and started to turn away.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Deputy Sheriff," taunted Spike. "I got a hunch maybe you did see him. Fact is, I sorta feel you been kind enough to bring him with you."

Larry stared hard at the foreman. The loggers behind began to laugh. Jean, who had come up with the stranger, was looking on with clouded eyes.

"Perhaps Seth Ragus in there is a friend of yours," Larry replied, jerking his head toward the jail.

"Perhaps," said Spike, still grinning maliciously. "But again, maybe you ain't got Ragus in there."

"Listen, Millard," said Larry, his temper going up. "What's the big idea you're trying to put over?"

"No big idea, Mister Deputy," repeated Spike. "Of course I may be wrong. A real sleuth like you couldn't make a mistake. But then you wouldn't object to showin' us this here terrible Seth, would you?"

"Sure he wouldn't!" chimed in one of the loggers.

"Yeah, let's see him!" yelled a burly voice.

Larry studied the men narrowly. There was something queer about the situation. He glanced at Jean and saw a worried frown on her face. Then he turned and unlocked the jail.

Spike stepped up. "Hey, Eddy," he called into the dark interior. "Better come out now. We're due back at camp."

A man appeared in the opening, and as he did, Millard reached up and yanked his long mustache. With a howl of pain the prisoner shot out a fist that caught Millard flush on the chin. He sprawled over to the ground at the feet of the astonished loggers.

Ragus stood with glaring eyes. "You double-crossin' skunk, you!" he snarled at the foreman. "After all the money I handed you for protection, you pull this trick on me!"

For a moment a hushed silence gripped the group. The loggers stared in blank surprise at the prisoner. Still not understanding, Larry shoved Ragus back into the jail and locked the door. When he turned toward the crowd again, the stranger with Jean had come up. His features were stern with anger.

"I demand an explanation," he said in a voice of authority. "If I don't get it, every man here is fired!"

There was a pause. The loggers looked from one to the other. Then a boy stepped out from the rest. Larry recognized him as the one who had brought the message the night before.

"I—I guess I can explain," he stammered. "That is—some of it. Spike sent Eddy Gaines up to the Cedar Creek cabin to wait for the deputy. Had him dressed like Seth Ragus, an' then sent me to tell Dillon the desperado was there. We all come in town to give Dillon the laugh when he brought in the wrong man, but—but it looks like there's been some mistake."

As Larry heard the boy's words, the whole situation became clear to him—how he had been sent to the cabin to be

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ridiculed later, and how he had been miraculously saved by the unlooked-for appearance of the real Ragus. When the youngster had finished, a broad grin had replaced Larry's former expression of bewilderment.

"I think I can tell the rest," he said to the stranger. "I fell for Millard's joke, all right, but it didn't work out the way he had it arranged. If some of you fellows will go up to the Cedar Creek cabin, you'll find this Gaines guy bound hand and foot, and not one of you can deny that my prisoner is Seth Ragus."

The stranger turned to him with extended hand. "I'm Charley Harris, owner of the Big Bear outfit, and I want to congratulate you on landing this fellow in jail. I'm keeping my word about that thousand dollars. What's more, I'll see to it that you get the job of deputy sheriff for this valley—permanently." He swung on Millard, who had got to his feet. "Spike, you're through! I ought to fire a bunch more of you men, but I'll give the rest another chance. But the first complaint I receive from the sheriff that you aren't coöperating, you'll be let out. Now get back to camp!"

Slowly and with sheepish looks the loggers dispersed. Jean drew nearer and took her place beside Larry. Harris faced the two with smiling countenance.

"I'll mail you that check, Dillon, when I get back to the city. Will that be all right?" he asked.

Larry grinned and turned questioning eyes to the girl's uplifted face.

"If it meets with Jean's approval, you can make it out to Mrs. Larry Dillon," he said happily.

"How about it, Jean?" Harris asked.

For a reply, she slipped her hand into Larry's.

"BIG TIMBER CUTS IN," by HOWARD J. PERRY, in Next Week's Issue.

SOME FIND

VERY often hikers are so busy discussing other matters than the beauties of nature that they sometimes miss much of its hidden charm. However, this cannot be said of the members of a hiking club who recently discovered a hidden city. In an almost unknown region of the mountainous State of Guerrero, in the vicinity of a village called Tlaxcalac, in Mexico, they ran across what is probably the remains of an ancient Indian city, and reported their find to the Mexican department of archæology.

These far-seeing excursionists found numerous small mounds scattered all over the valley, and in one place, where the earth had been washed away, were the remains of ancient stairways of plaster and stone. A large monolithic carving of a human head five feet high, together with another stone carved apparently with hieroglyphics, were discovered near the side of a hill.

The walkers must feel that their hiking was worth while for the Mexican government archæologists consider the find of importance, since it is not listed among the known sites of hidden cities.

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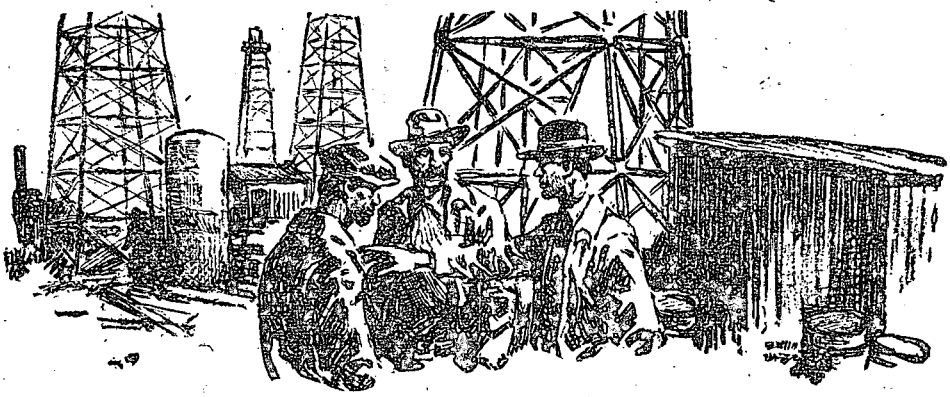

The Story Of Oil

(What Oil Is And Does)

By Thomas R. Best

OIL, or, to use the scientific word, petroleum, is a hydrocarbon of complex nature.

Actually, oil is energy. Whether on land, on sea, or in the air, oil makes the world go round.

Oil is a gift of nature, stored years ago in underground reservoirs. Contrary to general belief, it has been used for centuries, but not until the present industrial era did man need it in quantity. Natural seepage supplied the requirements of generations that depended upon the horse and sail for travel and on tallow or whale oil for illumination.

To most people, oil means gasoline. But gasoline is only the most important of the many products of petroleum.

Another is kerosene. There are families to-day, millions of them, that never use "coal oil" from one year's end to another. Yet it is necessary to go no further back into the dark ages than 1909 to find a day when three times as much kerosene as gasoline was used. Even to-day, one gallon of kerosene to every four or five of gasoline is produced.

Fuel oil represents as large a part of the barrel of crude as does gasoline. Much of the fuel oil is potential gasoline, as will be shown later.

Less in volume, but not in importance, are the lubricating oils. Substitutes for gasoline are chemically possible, whenever the need arises, but no substitute for oil as lubrication has yet been found.

These four common products do not exhaust the possibilities of petroleum as it comes from mother earth. Asphalt, tar, and coke, come from the residue of the barrel of oil; along with certain other substances not usually associated with petroleum, such as the bases of perfumery and other beautifiers. Lipsticks, for instance, come from oil refineries. Insecticides, medicine, and dyes are other by-products. There are fully five hundred separate uses for petroleum.

But it is with oil as energy that America of to-day is chiefly concerned. The continuance of our industrial supremacy depends heavily on the flow from California, Texas, and Oklahoma oil wells. Factories, with thousands of em-

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ployees, operate with oil as fuel or turn out products that need petroleum to be serviceable.

The airplane would be a useless thing without gasoline and the best of lubrication. Twenty-five million American motor cars rely on their daily supply of "gas." Ocean steamers would cost more to operate, and expensive machinery such as Diesel engines would have to be junked if the supply of oil were cut off.

In a word, the mechanical age has been built on a base of oil.

Where is the man to-day who does not benefit by the use of petroleum? If he is an apartment dweller and has no automobile, yet his life is influenced daily by machinery that makes a city, and the transportation that makes a city possible.

If he is a Dakota farmer, his tractor is useless without fuel. Or if he still depends upon horses for plowing, his tools, clothing, food, are produced or moved with the aid of oil.

Romance is not usually associated with oil. Boys do not run away from home to find oil, as they ran away to fight Indians, to go to the sea in ships, or to search for gold.

But oil does not lack interest. Men who uncover the mysterious power concealed thousands of feet down in the earth are as truly adventurous as those who roamed its surface to find new lands. Long ago drillers passed depths of one mile, and to-day they are groping toward ten thousand feet. What they find, and its influence on our lives as individuals and nations, is a fascinating story.

FREAK ANIMALS

EVERY now and then freak animals come into the world. Most of them are born dead or only survive for a short time. On the farm of Albert Good, near Linton, Indiana, a pig was recently born dead that had two bodies, eight legs, two tails, and one head. The other ten pigs of the litter were perfectly normal. Many freak animals have been born on American ranches, creatures with two heads, two tails, three eyes in one head, or even an extra leg, but none of these are as curious as a malformed calf belonging to J. N. Cecil, of Pettit, Kentucky that has but two legs.

"Can-go," as he is called, is able to walk like a man. Of course, it took him some time to balance himself on his hind legs and then to take steps, but he refused to let a physical handicap master him and, in spite of his three hundred pounds, he has learned to walk. With the love and attention that has been showered upon him by Mr. and Mrs. Cecil, he has accomplished great things.

Mrs. Cecil has trained him as one would a dog and he can lie down and play dead, closing his eyes until told to open them. He kisses those who are kind to him in the manner of pet dogs, and when he is hungry he rolls his tongue around in his mouth as though he were tasting a favorite morsel of food.

No doubt Can-go is the strangest calf alive and the most human. Whether in his weakness he has allowed man to help him, or whether because of his weakness he has developed other senses to a greater degree, is a question in many minds. At any rate, it is most interesting to note how Nature cares for her children all along the scale of life. When one faculty is taken away, other faculties are strengthened. That which seems unjust is always justified if we but let Nature care for us.

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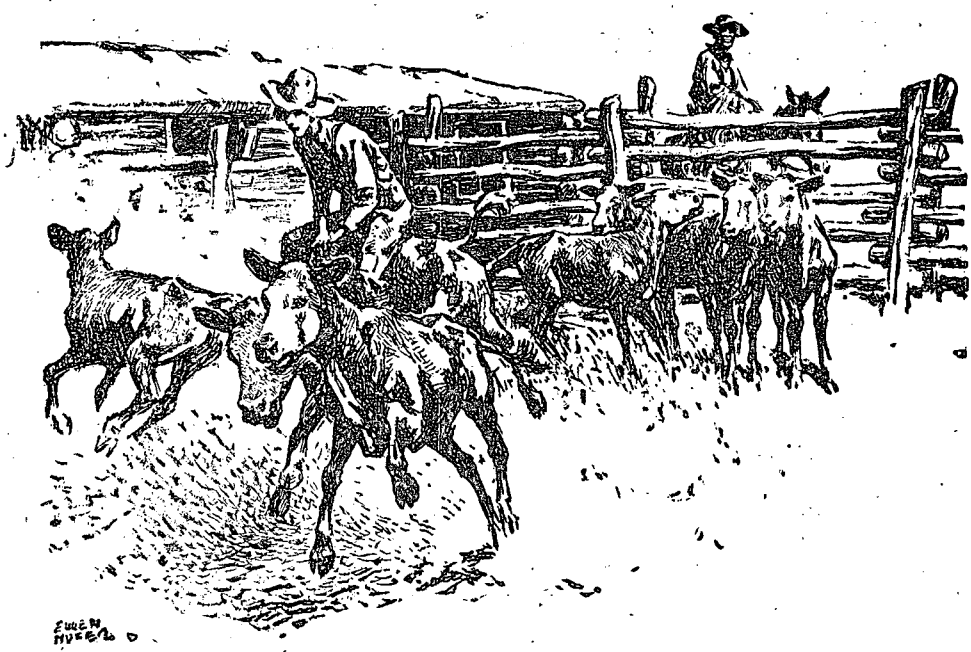

Rusty Of Crooked Creek

By Coe Bassett

Author of "Blue Gold," etc.

A BROWN-FACED cowboy sat with one fancy high-heeled boot thrown over the neck of his pony while he watched a scene common enough on a cow ranch, where children are forced to find their own amusements. In a corral near some long, low log buildings a child, in blue overalls and ragged denim shirt, was riding calves.

"Anyhow, he's on half of the time," "Rusty" thought. "While he's goin' up he's on, and comin' down he's off. That's about a fifty-fifty split. Whoa, there, guess I'd better take a hand in his game!"

The calf had suddenly become belligerent, and, as his rider hit the ground on all fours, the calf turned and butted a swift blow. Rusty had been the victim of angry yearlings himself many times, and he knew that the child's predicament might easily be serious. He spurred his pony to the fence, vaulted over and, grabbing the proddy calf by the tail, twisted vigorously.

"Baw!" protested the calf.

"Aw, shucks, I wouldn't have got hurt; you didn't have to horn in that way," said the calf rider.

"Well, I'm a son of a gun, if he ain't a she!" put in Rusty, running one hand through his mop of tousled red hair.

The girl sat up and laughed gleefully at the surprise on the young cowboy's face.

"Say, didn't you ever see a girl ridin' calves before?" she demanded.

Rusty shook his head. "I ain't ever knowed any girls so very intimatelike, but the few I've met all of 'em wore girls' clothes."

"Yeh, they do," answered the girl, "that is, those that have mothers and fathers, and—and folks."

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"Ain't you got any?"

"Any what, dresses like other girls?"

"No; folks."

The girl got up, brushing the dirt from her ragged overalls. "My folks all got drowned the time the big dam broke. I live with my uncle, Jim Lewis."

Rusty looked at her with added interest at this announcement. His business on this branch of Crooked Creek had to do with Lewis. He had nearly forgotten it in the surprise of finding that the calf rider was a girl.

"Oh," he said, "that's who you are!"

Tears came into the eyes of the girl as she noticed the change of expression on Rusty's face.

"There it goes again," she murmured. "You're goin' to be just like everybody else, and I thought at first that maybe you'd be nice."

"Well, ain't I nice, sort of?" Rusty protested. "I haven't said anything against your uncle, have I?"

"No, and you better hadn't," snapped the girl. "Uncle Jim is good to me. He bought me a lot of things. I've got clothes, but what's the use to wear 'em? Nobody will have anything to do with me. I fixed up one day and rode over to the B in a Box and thought I'd visit the Burley girls; but, gee, I like to have froze to death at dinner, and I didn't dare tell 'em I was intendin' to stay all night!"

"What's your name?" demanded Rusty.

"Celia Denton. What's yours?"

"Ralph Steele, but everybody calls me Rusty Steele."

Celia laughed merrily. "Come on in, Rusty, and I'll get you something to eat. You'll find oats in that box. Hang a nosebag on your pony."

Celia ran into the house, and Rusty fed his horse. There were some dried hides on the fence, and Rusty walked around the barn and carefully examined the brands from the flesh sides. A brand may be blotted or manipulated in many ways while the animal is alive, but Rusty knew that the gossip he had heard about Jim Lewis might be answered by the ineradicable scar on the under side. The hides all showed, however, Lewis's brand, a Bar Lazy L.

For some reason Rusty was glad that he had not found what he had half expected to see. He went on to the house and got his second startling surprise when he saw that Celia had made a quick change into a neat print dress and now wore pretty hose and small slippers.

"Gosh, I thought you was about ten years old!" he ejaculated.

"Seventeen," Celia answered. "I'm little. I only weigh a hundred and four."

"I'll bet you can ride," said Rusty.

"Of course a girl that's been raised on a ranch can ride and rope, and shoot, too, if necessary."

Rusty glanced at the well-stocked gun rack over the fireplace. He saw a light rifle that he knew must belong to Celia, and beside it hung a belt and a specially built Colt.

"You folks are well heeled for firearms," he remarked.

"Don't come Injunin' into the Bar Lazy L after dark unless you want to feel the sting of lead," cautioned the girl, laughing.

Rusty heard the gravel outside crunch under the quick footsteps of a heavy person. He looked toward the door just as a tall, grizzled man with piercing gray eyes stooped to pass through.

"Hello!" greeted Rusty, after the familiar manner of range men. "You see, I'm makin' myself to home."

Lewis grunted and shot a quick glance toward the girl.

"I asked him to come in, Uncle Jim," Celia explained. "He was ridin' past." She stopped and turned toward Rusty. "That is, I guess you was." Then her face again took on the suspicious ex-

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pression Rusty had noticed once before. "Just how did you come to stop here?" she demanded.

Rusty had not intended to tell Lewis all of his errand to Crooked Creek, but several things he had seen, together with what Celia had told him about her uncle, decided his next remark.

"I'm likely to be a neighbor of yours. I've filed on that vacant hundred and sixty across the valley where Spring Creek comes in."

The rage Rusty had expected to see in the eyes of the old rancher did not appear. On the contrary, he seemed friendly, asked numerous questions about Rusty's plans, how many cows he had, and how he expected to feed them that first winter. The three sat at the table long after the meal was finished. Rusty told how, ten years before, when he was a boy of twelve, he had taken a job as nighthawk for Trace Dalton, the biggest cowman on the upper Rio Grande, and how from the first he had taken his pay, which was then but fifteen dollars a month and board, in calves.

"Trace was more than willin' I should do that," Rusty explained. "Dogies wasn't worth much, and I was willin' to take spotted ones, off colors like duns, and brindles, that wasn't saleable, and he let me have 'em at twenty a head. I've traded some, and as soon as I was twenty-one I began to look around for some place I could file on. It wasn't till last week that Bob Laird, the lawyer in Monte, sent me a note that he had found a hundred and sixty that hadn't been taken up. I went to town and he helped me get my papers fixed up yesterday."

For the first time a real smile lit up Lewis's face. Rusty could understand how Celia might be very fond of the man.

"So you're the chap Bob told me about," Lewis conjectured. "I wonder if——"

Whatever it was that Lewis was about to tell them, Celia and Rusty did not learn till later, for they were all startled by the sound of a horse running on the hard road. Rusty saw both Lewis and his niece glance at the gun rack as they rose from the table. The girl ran to the window, Lewis standing in front of the fireplace, one hand near an old-fashioned Sharps rifle.

Celia ejaculated the one word "Deke!" Lewis's hand dropped to his side and he stepped back to where Rusty sat.

"Guess you'll have to go out the back way," was his startling announcement. "Wouldn't be best for you to be seen here now."

Even though he was curious to know who Deke was, and why Lewis was so anxious for him to leave, Rusty saw that it was the only thing for him to do. Celia stepped swiftly across the room toward the kitchen door.

For a moment Lewis gripped the hand of the younger man. "Go ahead with starting your ranch, boy," he said. "Laird told me all about you, and Laird is a safe man for you to tie to. Don't believe all you hear and only half you see."

With this enigmatical remark, Lewis pushed Rusty gently toward Celia, who stood impatiently waiting to conduct him outside so that he would avoid meeting this man who could be heard walking toward the front door. Mystery ever intrigues the young. Outside the kitchen door Rusty stopped.

"Why all the secrecy? I ain't done nuthin' to be ashamed of," he protested.

"Of course you haven't, silly, but didn't I tell you a while ago that no one in the country likes me? Surely you ought to suspect why."

Rusty thought of the hides on the back fence and of the stories he had heard about Lewis. None of the ranchers seemed to like the old man, and naturally Rusty had formed a prejudice against him. It was funny, he thought, how differently he felt about Celia now.

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He could not think of joking her as he had at first. The girl seemed to have laid off her rough language and actions with the overalls she had discarded when she changed to girls' clothing.

Celia stood near, while Rusty removed the nosebag from his horse's head and replaced the bridle.

"I'll be campin' across there on my ranch from now on," Rusty told the girl. "I'll come to see you sometimes."

A look that said more plainly than words that he would be welcome accompanied Celia's frank handshake.

"Come soon," she said, "or maybe I won't be here."

Rusty swung up and rode away.

"Now, what does all this mean?" he wondered. "All this that Lewis said about Laird having told him about me and not believin' all I hear and only half what I see, and Celia saying she might not be here? Well, anyhow, I'm goin' to have a look at my ranch."

The words "my ranch" caused the cowboy, who had dreamed for years of the day when he would own a little place and a few cows, to thrill with the joy of possession. He crossed the valley and found the section corner, from which he could easily trace out the boundaries of his land.

A broad, level meadow, covered with a thick growth of red-top and wire grass, was watered by a clear stream that came joyously down from the high mountains to the west. On one side of the valley a low cliff protected the park from wind, and on the other the slopes rose gently to aspen-covered hills where bunch grass and wild oats would provide late fall range for his cattle.

Rusty was delighted with his place, but as he stood appraising the treasure of a cold spring bubbling from a cave hollowed out at the base of the cliff, a question was raised in his mind. He saw plainly that his meadow had been mowed each year and the hay stacked on the Bar Lazy L. Why had not Lewis made some effort to acquire title to the land, and why had Laird, who was clearly a friend of Lewis, told Rusty of the place being on government land?

"Looks like somebody wanted me here," Rusty concluded, "but why, I can't understand. It sure looks like Lewis needed a neighbor and got Laird to pick on me."

He looked up at the heavy forest of straight, fine, red spruce suitable for house logs and fence posts. Again his eyes rested on the waving field of red-top.

"Well, I don't care why I was picked to have such a place. I've got it, and when I get me a cabin, and some stables and sheds built here beside this spring, and my cows over on that back range, I wouldn't trade this place for any ranch between Lost Trail and Taos."

The late July sun was behind the low western hills when Rusty finished riding over his land. He was skirting the side of the little valley, riding back toward the main Crooked Creek where the Bar Lazy L was located, when he came upon a small square stake driven firmly into the ground. Jealous of anything that even suggested that any one had been surveying his treasure, Rusty got off and examined the stake. In the plain lettering of a land surveyor he read:

9 + 50 — F7.10.

"Now, what the Sam Hill does that mean?" queried the boy.

Looking up the creek he saw another stake fifty feet distant. He went to that. It read:

Sta. 9—0.0.

Rusty ran one hand through his hair.

"Oh, so that's it! Burley wants to build a reservoir here on my place so's he can take the water away from the Bar Lazy L. Lewis gets onto it and consults Laird, who knows I'm lookin'

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for a ranch. He suggests to me that I file on the place so as to shut off Burley. I've found out quite a lot. Now maybe I'll find out what Celia meant about not being here long."

Rusty knew enough about land laws to realize that he had little time to lose if he wanted to hold his place. He rode to Monte that night, hired two Swedish laborers whom he knew to be good axmen, and by daylight next morning he was back at the place he had selected for his house.

"Now, you boys, get busy," he directed the men, "and slash down some logs and trim 'em up. I'll snake 'em down here, and by night we'll have us a house built."

Toward noon Rusty looked up from his work to see Celia sitting on a well-built sorrel horse.

"Hello," she greeted Rusty. "You're not losing any time, are you?"

Rusty grinned. "Well, I found something yesterday that hung a spur into me," he explained.

Celia nodded. "I know surveyors' stakes. I saw the men when they first started work here and I told Uncle Jim. He went to town right away. You're going to have visitors."

Rusty looked down the gulch. Two men were riding up. The expressions on their faces showed that they were not pleased at the appearance of the foundation that had been already laid. Burley was in the lead, and his son, Rondo, rode close behind his father. Both men were well armed. They rode past Celia without even looking at her.

"What are you doing here?" Burley demanded of Rusty.

Rusty did not like the man's tone. "Well, sir, if you'll look close," he said, "maybe you'll see that I am buildin' me a ranch house, sort of——"

"On government land?" snapped Burley.

"No, on my own homestead," Rusty retorted.

The two Burleys exchanged anxious glances. "Is this a bluff, or did you take up this land for Lewis?" asked the elder Burley.

Rusty saw that the two men meant trouble. He glanced toward where his gun had been laid while he worked at notching the logs for his cabin. It would be useless to make a break toward the spot. Such an action would be taken as sufficient excuse for one of the angry ranchmen to kill him, claiming that they had acted in self-defense. The axmen were too far away to be of any assistance. There was no doubt but that the Burleys saw their advantage and intended to profit by it.

"If you've really filed on this place," proposed the father, "I'll give you five hundred dollars for your relinquishment."

Rusty became suddenly crafty. He smiled as if pleased at the offer and walked closer to the man, evidently intent on bargaining with him. That one unarmed man would attempt to start trouble did not occur to either of the intruders. Celia, however, had seen a gleam in Rusty's eyes that she decided meant a fight, and while the three principle actors were intent on each other, she quietly moved her horse in the direction of the log where Rusty's gun lay.

Rusty stood close to the elder Burley. "You was offerin' me five hundred dollars to sign a contract to sell you my ranch." He spoke in a low, tense voice. "Here's my answer."

Neither the old rancher nor his son was prepared for Rusty's sudden change of front. One hand of the red-headed cowboy flashed to the butt of Burley's gun and jerked at the weapon.

Fast as was the movement, Rondo Burley's foot moved more quickly and one spur stung the flank of the horse his father rode. Even as Rusty's skill enabled him to grasp the weapon, a plunge of the horse sent him sprawling

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on his back. Instantly, Rondo spurred forward in an attempt to make his own horse trample Rusty.

None of the participants of the fight had thought of Celia, but as Rondo's horse reared under the cruel jabs of the younger ranchman's spurs, a gun cracked and Rondo's left hand hung useless at his side. Celia rushed to stand over the helpless Rusty, a smoking gun in her hand.

"Back up, you murderers!" she ordered the two astonished ranchmen. "You can't double up on an unarmed man while I can throw a gun."

Rondo, holding his injured hand in the other, turned upon the girl, his face lurid with rage.

"You little wild cat," he shouted, "this only clinches what we've got in store for your uncle! I'll make you wish you'd died before you ever saw this red-headed squatter."

By this time, Rusty was on his feet. He unloaded the gun he had taken from Burley and tossed him the empty weapon.

"You two get goin' quick, and don't start threatenin' a lady!"

"Lady?" sneered Rondo.

"You heard what I said," snapped Rusty.

The bluffers heard the noise made by the axmen crashing through the brush as they hurried down the mountainside. The Burleys did not know who was coming, but that whoever it was had been attracted by Celia's shot was evident.

"You'll hear from me later," threatened the older man as he followed his son down the valley.

Rusty turned to the girl: "Thanks a lot——" he began. "Why, what makes you so white? You surely ain't sorry for what you done, are you?"

Celia's stiffened lips barely moved. "Oh, Rusty, I might have killed a man," she gasped.

"Yeh, I know," comforted Rusty, "but you didn't, so don't worry. What did he mean about havin' something up his sleeve for your uncle?"

Celia's color returned. Her eyes blazed angrily. Without another word she walked to her pony and rode him away in the direction of the Bar Lazy L.

Rusty pondered the strange occurrence and the indignation that Celia had shown. He decided that underneath the smoke of gossip about crooked cattle deals there must be some fire, and that the Burleys had some power over Lewis which made Celia regret having antagonized them.

The young rancher's heart thrilled as he thought how bravely Celia had come to his rescue and how pretty she had looked as she had defied the Burleys. He could not for a moment believe that Celia was even vaguely connected with anything wrong, but after the manner of young lovers, he was impatient. If Burley intended to make trouble for Lewis in order to get even with Celia for stopping them in their attempt to run him off his claim, he was going to know all about it and, if necessary, to take a hand. He saddled a horse and left his own camp shortly before dark.

Skirting the valley, Rusty kept in the shadow of the willows until he was back of the Bar Lazy L buildings. Here he tied his horse and crept forward. Strangely, the warning Celia had given him the day before, "not to come Injunin' around the ranch," came to him now. That was exactly what he was doing, and that it was dangerous business Rusty was convinced. He had crawled up to the dark spot between two small haystacks beyond the barn and was attempting to recognize the two men whom he could see were sitting on the porch of the ranch house when he heard a low, rasping sound on the other side of the stack. At first Rusty thought that loose stack made the noise, but this idea he soon discarded. At this time of

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year dry hay would not tempt either cattle or horses to come up from the green pasture along the creek. If animals were there some one was leading or driving them.

Rusty lay still and waited. Except for the croaking of frogs along the lazily winding stream there was no sound. He waited for several minutes, and, hearing no further noise, he moved to the end of the stacks. Here an unmistakable odor came strong to his nostrils. He shuddered at the thought of what he would probably find at the end of the stack beside the corral, but kept on stubbornly making his way along the dark shadow. His foot touched something soft, yielding. The ominous odor grew stronger.

Rusty knelt to touch the gruesome thing and was almost overwhelmed with relief when he realized that the terrible object he had dreaded to find was nothing worse than the hide of a freshly killed steer. But why should it have been dragged here under the haystack at night so stealthily? He moved so that he could again see the two people on the porch. They were where they had been ever since he began his dangerous investigation. That some one other than these two had dragged the hide there, Rusty very well knew. He would have given a great deal to know who it was that he had heard moving about the haystack.

He saw the glow of two cigarettes on the porch. Celia did not smoke. The two people he had been watching must be Lewis and the man Celia had called Deke. An icy hand gripped Rusty's heart at the thought that the girl must have ridden the horse that he had heard come up from the creek bank and had dragged the hide. If so, Celia must at least know of her uncle's operations.

Rusty at that moment would have given everything he possessed, even his beloved ranch, if he could have had proof that Celia was innocent of the crime of stealing cattle. He knelt beside the hide and pulled it around until he felt on the under side the welt caused by the brand. He shuddered as his experienced touch told him that the steer had belonged to Burley. The brand was a distinct B in a Box.

The temptation came to him to drag the hide to his own ranch and dispose of it there. Evidently, Lewis had been warned by Celia that Burley had threatened him and so had arranged for the girl to drag the incriminating hide of a recent kill close to the haystack, while he and the man who helped him sat on the porch apparently enjoying an evening smoke.

From the hard-packed road came the sound of rapidly beating hoofs. Rusty was sure now that his solution of the mystery was the right one. Lewis was killing cattle and selling the beef in Monte or back at one of the mining camps. Celia had in a moment of thoughtlessness told him that she might not be at the Bar Lazy L long. With a heavy heart, Rusty leaned back, waiting to watch what must prove to be the dramatic finish of Lewis's career.

Again Rusty heard a horse coming at a trot past the barn in the direction of the haystacks. The sound showed that the animal did not want to come. He was snorting, and twice he dodged back. His rider spurred savagely and cursed. Rusty's eyes blazed with a new emotion. He leaned close to the stack out of sight of the horseman. A dozen men rode across the dooryard and surrounded the house. Rusty could no longer see the two on the porch, for he was too much interested in something much nearer, something that had upset all his calculations and sent a wild thrill of hope into his heart. He picked up the hide and tossed it back of him onto the stack.

Rusty heard a sharp command to "Throw up your hands!" but he knew it was not directed toward him. Some one at the house had evidently called upon

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Lewis to surrender. If Rusty were to be of any assistance to Celia and her uncle he must work fast.

The rider, having failed to force the frightened horse up to the stack, got off, and came toward the end of the stack. Another man joined him. Rusty had moved back away from the spot where the hide had been secreted. The men came on, kicking the loose hay about, hunting for it. The one who had ridden up first spoke to his companion.

"That's funny. I know I left it here right under the second brace on the stack."

The hammer dog on Rusty's gun clicked. It was an ominous sound in the stillness.

"You double-crossers are standin' on the edge of kingdom come and your feet are on awful slick ground." Rusty drawled the words out laconically.

The men were unable to see him standing, as he was close to the stack out of the dim starlight. The click of his gun and his sententious words, however, carried conviction.

"Who are you and what do you want?" demanded the first one to arrive, raising his hands slowly so that Rusty saw that the left hand was bandaged with a white cloth.

"That bandage sure gives you away, Rondo," Rusty bluffed. "I was standin' here when you planted that hide taken from one of your own steers and fixed to make it look like Lewis had been stealin' your cattle. Don't try that," he snapped as Rondo's right hand began to lower. "Both of you keep 'em up high and walk toward the house."

On the porch, Lewis and a young man stood bound while the sheriff questioned them. Ranchers and cowboys stood about, among them were the elder Burley and Rusty's old boss, Trace Dalton. Neither of the captured men appeared to be much disturbed.

Again there came the sound of rapid hoofbeats on the road. Rusty prodded his captives in the back and halted them outside the ring that was formed around Lewis and his companion. Two riders slid their horses to a stop, and Bob Laird, the lawyer, elbowed his way through the crowd. Rusty saw Celia's white face as she sat her horse beside the one Laird had ridden.

"G'wan, Rondo," the young rancher commanded. "Here's where you speak your piece, and you'd sure better tell the truth, 'cause if you don't I will."

The whole crowd turned in astonishment. Lewis seemed more surprised than any one else. Laird then spoke to Rusty.

"What's happened, boy? How did you come to get into this game?"

"I was comin' across by the haystack a bit ago and I heard something queer. After listening a while I went to where I'd heard a man drag something. Trace, if you and one of your men will go to the haystack and bring a freshly killed hide you'll find, I'll tell you then how it got there."

Trace Dalton obeyed. No one objected as Laird stepped forward and cut the ropes that bound Lewis's hands and those of the man he called Deke. Trace brought the hide and threw it on the porch.

Rusty prodded Rondo with his gun. "Now, you tell 'em," he ordered.

"Wait," the young man who had been bound with Lewis commanded. "I'll do the talking." He turned back the lapel of his coat and showed a United States marshal's badge.

Burley moved as if he would attempt to disappear in the crowd. The sheriff took him by the arm.

"Don't get shy, Burley," he countered. "You know you insisted on my comin'. It ain't polite to quit a game you started."

"My name is Reemer," the marshal introduced himself. "Deacon, folks call me, or Deke for short. I've been stay-

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ing here at Lewis's for a month working on this case to find out who it was that was spreading stories that reflected upon the reputation and credit of Jim Lewis. Suspicion has pointed toward Burley and his family, but we had no positive proof until this afternoon, when Celia, Mr. Lewis's niece, overheard a threat which made me suspicious that something like this would be tried. So I stayed here with Lewis in order that there could be no doubt about where he was, in case some one should accuse him of killing cattle, while Celia rode to Monte for Laird. It seems that these people might have made it difficult to prove that Lewis was innocent, however, if this young man"—motioning toward Rusty—"had not got the goods on Burley's son."

"It was all because Burley wanted the Bar Lazy L for a reservoir site," Laird explained. "He has been trying to get the whole community down on Lewis so that he would sell out cheap."

When the sheriff had left with the Burleys, and Deke had gone with Laird, the ranchers apologized to Lewis for the way they had acted, and Trace Dalton invited all the residents of the valley to his house the following Saturday.

"We'll barbecue a steer and dance all night to celebrate the clearing up of the Crooked Creek mystery," he concluded. "Where's Rusty? I want him and your niece to lead the grand march."

Rusty and Celia were standing at the end of the porch.

"What did you mean last night when you said that if I wanted to see you I'd better come soon?" asked the cowboy.

Celia stood close to him, one small hand clutching his shirt collar.

"Well, I wanted you to come. When a girl is turned down by even her girl friends she wants to tie onto the first boy that treats her kindly. Besides, Uncle Jim was about to send me away because he wouldn't have me treated so."

"But now"—Rusty's voice was very gentle—"that place of mine only needs you to make it heaven."

Celia laughed a low, happy chuckle. "What a cunning red-headed angel you'll make."

In Next Week's Issue, "BLACK SHEEP'S WOOL," by SETH RANGER.

ISLAND FISHERS RUN MARATHON

MOST followers of Isaac Walton feel that they have done a big day's work if, after sitting in the broiling sun for hours, they can bring home a few good-sized fish, or, in fact, even one in their basket. Not so the fishermen of Manchester in Montego Bay, Jamaica, whose day is not complete without a veritable marathon as part of their daily program.

After their morning's supply of fish is procured at Alligator Bay—a spot which, by the way, has no alligators—they pack their catch on large trays. The men then place the trays on their heads, and without holding them, start on a steady run of nineteen miles to the nearest town of Mandeville. The entire distance is covered without a stop or a change of pace—a most remarkable feat of balancing, as the loaded trays are not touched during the run.

When they arrive at the town they go from house to house until they have sold all their fish. They then walk the same distance home again. This feat of endurance is carried on almost every day of their lives.

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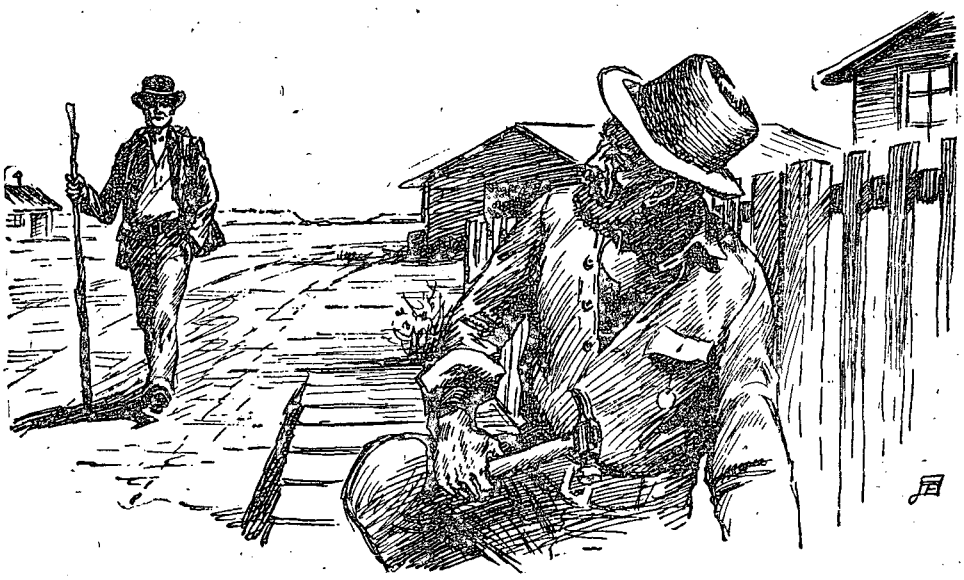

Mack Revives A Ghost Town

By Hugh F. Grinstead

Author of "Santa Rides Horseback," etc.

IT was with ever quickening interest that old Mack Barnes looked up from the task of nailing a loose board on the gate to see a stranger approaching afoot. Mack had been all alone for more than a week now in the little cabin on the hillside, and he was beginning to crave the sound of a human voice that was not his own. He was lonesome, he could not truthfully deny it. In spite of the fact that only a week before he had stoutly contended that he would be pleased to get rid of his partner for a month, the homely face of old "Idaho" Freeman would have been a welcome sight before the first week of his absence was at an end.

When two men have lived together as partners and companions for near thirty years, it is but natural that they should at times tire of each other's company. Also, it is impossible for one of them to be absent without being missed. Idaho had been gone a week now, and if his plans held, he would not be home for three weeks more.

When the stranger was nearer, Mack saw that he was more young than old, though by no means youthful, and that he plodded wearily, as one will when he is hungry or has been a long time on the road. There was a stubble of beard on his face, his clothes were dust-covered and much the worse for having been slept in. He carried no pack except a small bundle that might have contained an extra shirt or a pair of trousers; but when he saw that he was being observed, he threw back his shoulders and came on with the air of one who owns, or expects to own, a goodly slice of this old world.

"Morning, brother," he greeted, and white teeth gleamed smilingly out of the grime of an unwashed face.

"Come in an' set a while," Mack invited, warmed by the sound of a

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friendly voice. You look like you was petered out, an' I reckon you might like a good cold drink of water."

"A quart of it; the last I run across was warm as milk. This is the first house I have seen since this time yesterday."

"Wouldn't surprise me you'd mislaid some meals in that time," Mack suggested.

"Mislaid is right, old-timer. You might say I had postponed as many as two straight, and if your hospitality is the kind that wears, I hope to fill an aching void before I continue my journey."

"We got a coupla sides of bacon an' three sacks of flour that I reckon had ought to be enough to do the trick, besides some coffee to wash it down with," Mack replied with a grin.

"I hereby accept your hospitality, and I won't insult you by offering to pay for it," the stranger announced with a bow. "I am financially cramped at the present writing, but hope springs eternal in the human breast."

"You're welcome to all you can eat," Mack replied. "I got a little left from breakfast, an' if it won't spoil your appetite for dinner you can eat it right now."

"Brother, I have an appetite that positively cannot be impaired," confidently declared the visitor.

When he had scoured his face and hands with soap and water, an astonishing change resulted. The skin beneath the sandy stubble was more pink than tanned, which caused Mack to revise his first guess that the man was a sheep-herder. They were a nondescript lot, these herders, but one could not follow a band of sheep for more than a week or two without the natural pink of the skin turning to a leathery tan. By the same token, the man could be neither ranch hand nor professional vagabond. Besides, the genus hobo was rarely found sixty miles from a railroad, and almost as far from the frequented paths of man.

"Amos Patton is the name, mister, and I'm a tourist," volunteered the stranger between prodigious bites of cold meat and bread, as if he sensed the question in the mind of his host.

Mack nodded. It mattered not to him what name the man chose to go by; for names, like clothes, could be quickly and easily changed to suit every occasion. But so far as he could see, if the fellow were a tourist, he seemed to be getting little pleasure out of traveling. He had certainly selected a difficult route.

"The name sticks the year round, but I ain't just a hobo out of the nowhere headed into the somewhere," explained the hungry wayfarer when the last crumb of cooked food was gone. "I got a trade, a visible means of support, and I'm on my way to some certain place. Yes, sir, the art preservative is my line."

"Huh?" Mack queried.

"The art preservative of all the arts."

"I reckon you won't find nothin' much to preserve in these parts, not unless you tackle chokecherries or wild grapes."

"I guess you don't quite catch on, mister. I am a journeyman printer."

In all his life, Mack had never heard of a tramp printer. Even had he been familiar with the species, he would have marveled at finding one so far from the centers of communication.

"You mean, you print papers an' suchlike?" Mack questioned in evident doubt.

"Exactly, and I am on my way now to accept a position with the *Nugget*, the leading weekly paper in—let me see—Goldacre, that's the name of the town."

"Goldacre!" Mack exclaimed.

"You know where it is, do you, and how far?"

"Yes, but——"

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"Now don't tell me I have come miles out of my way since leaving the railroad three days ago," interrupted the man who said his name was Amos Patton. "I have already been told that several times along the way, and always my informant seemed to think there was something funny about it. What I want to know now is the distance from here."

"It's twenty miles the way the trail runs, but—er—did you say you had a job waitin' for you when you got there?"

"Oh, there have been no advance negotiations, but men everywhere desire my services. The name of Amos Patton is known in every print shop between the Father of Waters and the Pacific Ocean, and I have worked in a goodly number of them. I just walk in and begin work with no preliminaries more than just making known my name. I can take any old dishrag and make it look like the New York *Herald*. Give me a pot of glue, a pair of scissors, and a few scraps of paper, and I can build the most marvelous overlays and underlays. A toothpick and a little beeswax are all I need to make worn-out type print like it was fresh from the foundry."

Mack was properly impressed, though what he had just listened to was practically all Greek to him. He liked to hear a man blow his own horn, and this journeyman printer was certainly most adept in that line. More than that, he had an entertaining way about him. But it would not be right to let him go on in anticipation of what lay ahead of him without advising him of the hopelessness of his quest.

"But Goldacre is a dead town," Mack announced with simple directness.

"Dead towns is my specialty," Amos Patton replied, waving aside the objection as trivial. "The press is the pulse of the population; a live paper makes a live town. I am what you call an all-around man. If the editor is incapacitated, I can write the matter for the paper, besides setting all the type and pulling my token on a G. Wash."

"You can't do nothin' with Goldacre, because it's defunct an' decomposed," Mack insisted.

"Brother, you don't realize the power of the press," declared the visitor. With a dramatic flourish, he repeated:

> "But mightiest of the mighty means,
> On which the arm of progress leans,
> Man's noblest mission to advance,
> His woes assuage, his weal enhance,
> His rights enforce, his wrongs redress—
> Mightiest of mighty is the press."

Mack's eyes widened in wonder and admiration. Old Judge Foster, down at Burnt Rock, couldn't beat that for a spellbinder. There was no doubt that this fellow, disreputable as he appeared, was all he claimed to be and could do what he said he could—if he had a chance.

"I reckon you don't quite understand yet, pardner," Mack hastily put in. "Goldacre was all right in its day, but now it ain't nothin' but a ghost town."

"A graveyard, in common parlance. You can't tell me anything about that kind. You couldn't sell three inches of advertising to the leading merchant on a bet, or get a new subscriber if you went to every house in town. Am I right?"

"I allow you didn't miss it none," Mack agreed.

"It may look hopeless to an outsider, but I'll stake my reputation against fifty dollars of any man's money that in less than thirty days after I run off the first issue of the *Nugget*, this Goldacre place will take a new lease on life, the wheels of progress will hum a little louder, and men will be scrambling for a chance to read the paper."

"Pardner, gamblin' on sure things is my besettin' sin, but I couldn't take a mean advantage of no man just because he happened to be ignorant of the facts,"

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Mack replied. "They ain't nobody a-tall livin' in the old ghost town of Goldacre, account of everybody movin' away when the gold petered out, what little they was of it."

"What!" exclaimed Amos Patton, a little crestfallen, yet with an incredulous stare at his informant. "Can it be possible that I have been wrongly informed?"

He brought from his pocket a soiled bit of paper, evidently a clipping from a book, and held it out to Mack, who adjusted his spectacles and, with more or less understanding, read the following:

GOLDACRE, populated 1564; La Luz County. Sunset Stage Line, Adams Express. Mining chief industry. Surrounded by rich mineral lands, timber and grazing. Nugget—Sat.—Ind.—1881—$1.00—500. J. M. Purdue, Editor and Publisher.

"I'm beginnin' to get the idee," Mack announced after reading the clipping over a second time. "Twenty year ago Goldacre had about so many people in it, an' old Jim Purdue was editin' a paper he called the *Nugget*, what time he wasn't drunk. If you'd happened along about then, I allow you'd 've found things just about like this says."

"My mistake—two of them," responded the other man with a gesture of resignation. "First error was in being born too late. I was a smooth-faced kid just learning the trade back in my old home town when Goldacre was in its heydey. Then I make a bum guess when I pick on a newspaper directory of ancient vintage to try my luck on when my feet got to itching a couple of weeks ago. I was working in a two-man shop in a little Iowa town when I hearkened to the call of the road."

Mack was listening intently enough, but he puckered his forehead in a vain effort to get the meaning of it all.

"It's a system all my own, this opening a directory at random and picking a place to light from the two pages before me," explained the man of restless heels. "Goldacre was there right before my eyes; and what could be more enticing than a nugget in such a setting? The directory was dated in the early '80s, and was kept on top of the stool to make it high enough after the legs wore off. Towns have a way of staying put, and even increasing in population as the years go by. How could I know this Goldacre place was the one outstanding exception in all my experience? I beat my way in box cars as far as the rails went, then set out afoot to find this place I had marked on the map. You might say I have traveled by dead reckoning this far."

There was silence for a time. Mack scratched his head and looked thoughtfully out at the open door. He felt a genuine sympathy and admiration for the man who had come a thousand miles, beating his way on freight trains and walking over unfamiliar trails, only to encounter defeat near the end of his journey.

"I—I reckon you won't be goin' on no farther now," Mack suggested, when his guest remained silent.

"Brother, I have seen no black cat run athwart my course," the visitor responded, after a moment in which he seemed to be turning the matter over in his mind. "It's bad luck to turn back without a warning. I have followed this system of peregrination for ten years, and only once have I failed to arrive happily at my destination. Then it was jail bars that deterred me till my heels ceased to itch. But that is another story."

Mack glowed with admiration of this man whom only jails could keep from carrying out his purpose, trivial as it might seem. If he had set his heart on going on to Goldacre, there would be no obstacles thrown in his way.

"You're welcome to stay here long as you like, an' when you get ready, I'll drive you up to Goldacre in the buck-

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board. I ain't been to the old town in quite a spell, myself, an' a sight of it would kinda remind me of old times."

"You overwhelm me with kindness, brother. Soon as I get on my feet again, I will send you a ten-year subscription to the leading paper of whatever town I happen to land in next. I may not stay in Goldacre a day, or even an hour, but I can't turn down a hunch as long as I'm foot-loose. If the *Nugget* was still there, I would take a try at raising the old town from the dead, make it turn over and rattle its bones once, anway."

"I dunno as you could say old Jim Purdue's paper was still there, body an' soul, but the makin's is all there in the same shack where it always was, unless it's been took away recent," Mack replied. "I reckon the feller that held the mortgage on it didn't think enough of it to haul it away, because the last time I was up there I see them funny little boxes settin' up slantin' on the racks, an' a big heavy thing with a crank like a sausage grinder settin' on a bench, all of 'em covered with about two inches of fine sand an' dust."

"An army press!" exclaimed Amos Patton, half to himself. "They'll print, humor 'em a little, even if they do run slow and hard. Yes, sir, I'll stake my reputation against fifty dollars——"

"That ain't odds enough," Mack interrupted, with a grin of delight. "I'll go you five hundred you can't even make Goldacre turn over in its sleep. I dunno what I'll do with your repytation when I win it, give it back to you, I reckon."

"You have been a friend to me, and I hesitate to accept a wager with such heavy odds. Can you afford to lose five hundred dollars?" Patton asked, looking round at the mean furnishings of the cabin as if he doubted whether the combined value of all Mack's belongings would total the amount he proposed to bet.

"Me an' my old pardner has got a copper mine that brings us in five hundred dollars ev'ry three months without us turnin' a hand."

"Oh, you have a partner?"

"Yeah, of the entitlements of Idaho Freeman. Idaho is gone off to Denver City now to see if he can get rid of some of the int'rust while he's seein' the elephant an' hearin' the owl," Mack explained. "He's a talkative old cuss, an' I was gettin' plumb lonesome when you happened along. I'm glad to have comp'ny for a while."

It lacked more than an hour of noon, but Mack set about getting dinner. There were stewed prunes and beans in addition to the usual bacon and flapjacks, for the entertainment of a guest called for a little extra effort. And while Mack cooked, the visitor talked, regaling his host with accounts of his varied experiences. He had launched more than one newspaper alone, with no more capital than unlimited hope and a grim determination. He had been editor, printer, and office boy all in one; but one thing and another had happened to his journalistic ventures. Oftener than not, he walked off and left a good job.

When the two pulled out for Goldacre the next morning, the buckboard was piled high with provisions and bedding. Mack had seen his new friend perform at three meals, and he did not want to run short of grub within the week. Amos Patton was anxious to reach his destination as quickly as possible, and Mack was no less eager. He had entered into the spirit of the occasion. The novelty of it appealed to him. He would have felt no regrets at losing the five hundred dollars, but there seemed not the remotest possibility of his doing so.

They arrived at Goldacre shortly after noon, frightening the bats and owls from the empty buildings as they drove along the deserted street. The

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place was, indeed, ghostly in appearance. Doors sagged or swayed creakily with every gust of wind. There were holes in the roofs, and most of the glass had been broken out of the windows. An ancient stagecoach, victim of rust and decay, lay in a broken heap by the side of what had once been a livery stable. Such signs as remained were faded and dim, but it was not difficult to locate the office of the one-time Goldacre *Nugget*.

The self-styled doctor of defunct newspapers set eagerly to work, cleaning out the twenty-year accumulation of dust that all but hid the modest equipment. The cases were warped, and the type scattered; rains leaking through a break in the roof had rusted the old press until it would not budge until it had received a liberal application of kerosene that had been brought along in a can for that purpose. Mack lent a hand where he could, and by nightfall the heavier layers of dust had been removed, and they knew that not a thing was missing, unless it was some of the furniture that some belated camper had used to start his fire.

In a corner of the room was a bundle of news print in a fair state of preservation, except that it was faded and brittle on the exposed edges of the sheets. There was also a can of printer's ink, dry and hard in spite of the fact that it had been kept closed. Kerosene would do wonders toward softening that. A form of type was on the ancient press, left there just as if the place had been deserted on the day of going to press, possibly before the paper had been printed.

After a night's rest, the new proprietor of the Goldacre *Nugget* continued his investigation and the work of cleaning out more dust. After using more kersosene and a rag, he decided to get an impression of the form on the press. The ink was dry, the roller hard and lifeless, but after repeated trials, he succeeded in getting a splotchy print. He read it over carefully, marking such changes as would be necessary.

"This article about the execution of Charles Guiteau for the murder of President Garfield will have to be killed," he said, loosening the form and lifting out a section of the type. "The story of a running fight between officers and bandits is good any day. With a change of names, the account of the discovery of gold in Blue Canyon by Joe Potter will stand as news of the day. All this other stuff could happen to-day as well as twenty years ago, with some little change."

There was an advertisement of the Sunset Stage Lines, another of the Crystal Palace saloon, while the Miner's Rest tavern gave notice that it furnished food and lodging for both man and beast. There were other advertisements, extolling the wares of men long dead, all of which were allowed to remain in order to fill the meager columns.

"Don't seem like it's been twenty year since Red Hawkins got what was comin' to him in the Crystal Palace saloon," Mack mused, as he read over paragraphs that had once been news, chuckling reminiscently now and then. "I reckon it was about the time Joe Potter come in an' allowed he'd struck gold in Blue Canyon, when it wasn't nothin' but iron pyrites. Old Joe was a awful liar, an' they wasn't nobody fooled. Fellers was doin' all they could to make a stampede, but it didn't do no good. The old camp was on its last laigs."

"When I set the date up about twenty years, slip in my name in the place of J. M. Purdue's, and set my salutatory long enough to fill the space taken up by the Guiteau hanging that I just took out, we'll be ready to run off the first edition," Amos Patton presently announced. "The *Nugget*, still independent in politics, is published on Saturday, costs a dollar a year, and has five

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hundred circulation. No self-respecting editor ever claims less."

Resorting to methods practised back in the days of Benjamin Franklin, the printer fashioned a rude ink ball in lieu of the useless roller. By a slow and laborious process, with Mack's help, he succeeded in printing a hundred copies in little less than half a day, half of which could be read, though dim and splotchy.

"Circulation is the problem now," Patton mused, as he sat upon an upturned box and viewed the results of his labor. "No home patronage; outside communication cut; not even a post office in town. Without circulation, the press loses its power."

"The post office was took down to Badger Valley some time back," Mack volunteered. "The bats an' owls didn't seem to have no need of it, an' it come in right handy to have a post office already built when they began packin' the mail out oncet a week from Burnt Rock to Badger Valley."

"But my reputation is still at stake," Patton went on. "All the subscribers are dead or removed to parts unknown, and even the exchange list needs revising. Without readers, the printed line is a dead thing like this town. I wonder if I really opened that old newspaper directory at the right page."

"The nearest post office is Dry Valley, more'n twenty miles away. If you could figger out where you wanted them papers sent, I could drive over there with 'em," Mack offered, willing to relieve the situation to the extent of his ability.

An hour or two later he was on his way to Dry Valley with every copy of the Goldacre *Nugget* neatly wrapped and addressed, ready for mailing. Some of them went to old friends and acquaintances not so far away, many to other States, and a dozen to exchanges far and near. Amos Patton remained behind to distribute the type and gather news for another issue, with the nearest permanent habitation a dozen miles away.

Mack did more than mail the papers in Dry Valley, which was the county seat of La Luz County. By paying some of the tax bills long due, he came into possession of half of Goldacre. A foolish whim, he knew, but it pleased him to be foolish at times. He returned to Goldacre the following morning with some needed supplies that he had taken this opportunity to procure, besides some things that Patton had instructed him to beg, borrow, or steal, from the local printing office.

"Thirty days, I said," Amos Patton reminded his aid upon his return. "The seeds have been sown, and before the month is up the harvest should be at hand. Goldacre will blossom like the rose that unfolds with the morning dew."

Mack grinned at his companion's show of enthusiasm and confidence. If every dollar he had was as sure of remaining in his possession as were the five hundred he had wagered, there would be little to worry about. It was all a huge joke, this bringing to life the old mining camp. It was a game of make-believe that he thoroughly enjoyed, however.

There followed days of semi-idleness when Mack imagined his companion became restless. After a few hours' work with his type each day, the printer would propose a walk among the fir and juniper trees on the mountainside or along the little stream that tumbled over the rocks on the far slope.

"Gee, old-timer, this is the life!" he would exclaim, as he lay on his back looking up through the branches at the sky. "Just smell the trees! If a fellow could always breathe pure air like this, he wouldn't want a lot of things that are not good for him. He could almost believe he was a free man."

There were a lot of things about

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Amos Patton that Mack could never understand. He didn't try to. For instance, the man was a vagabond in every outward appearance, yet his speech was almost scholarly when he wished it to be. He was garrulous at times, and again he would sit silently thoughtful for an hour, replying with a nod or a monosyllable when spoken to. In either mood, Mack was fond of his company.

It wasn't really thirty days. To be exact, it was just fifteen days from the time the two men had arrived at the old ghost town; two weeks of idleness spiced with just enough work to add zest. Mack had returned from Dry Valley after mailing the third issue of the *Nugget*. When he topped the rise and looked down upon the huddle of weathered shacks, he shook himself and rubbed his eyes.

He stopped short and stared, for down there in the flat at the far end of Goldacre's one straggling street, he counted three camps. Looking farther, he could see the dust of a new arrival and the outline of a pack animal headed for Blue Canyon. The dry bones of the old camp had taken on life!

He went on with misgivings. Patton was waiting for him, a triumphant grin on his face.

"Men have hearkened to the printed word; news has been augmented in the telling; and lo! we have the nucleus of a boom that makes the bones of Goldacre move restlessly," he repeated.

"I ain't doubtin' none of it, but seems like we'd best be gettin' away from here pronto," was Mack's ready reply. "When these fellers that's come find out it's a joke on them, they ain't a-goin' to feel kindly to'ard us."

"A temporary exit is expedient, but no harm has been done. Most of these are but knights of the restless heel. Brown will say the joke is on Smith, and together they will laugh at Jones when he arrives. They will all be gone in a week, to let Goldacre sleep."

"I'm for gettin' away permanent. I might know some of them fellers, an' they got a way of turnin' a joke," Mack growled, as he reached for a roll of bedding to toss it onto the buckboard.

"Do I win?" Amos Patton queried with exasperating unconcern.

"You do," Mack replied, casting an anxious eye in the direction of the nearest camp.

Ten minutes later they were leaving Goldacre behind them. A mile on the way, where they crossed a little stream in a grassy flat with scattering trees on the slope, Amos Patton called a halt.

"I like this place, and here I will stop," he announced. "If the populace demands the scalp of the archdeceiver, why, I am just another humble prospector trying his luck here by the creek."

"Why—why, ain't you goin' out where you can spend them five hundred dollars you just won?" Mack asked incredulously.

"Don't give me a nickel of that money," Patton replied almost fiercely. "No, I am safer here. A relentless enemy waits to pounce upon me when I am in the cities, even in the small towns."

"Some feller gunnin' for you? Because if they is, I can bring you Idaho's old gun an' some cartridges."

"It's no mere man."

"A woman needs handlin' the same way if she goes an' forgets she's a lady."

"My enemy is neither man nor woman. John Barleycorn is his name. To be more explicit, the demon rum."

"Oh!" Mack gasped, a little above a whisper, but there was a wealth of understanding in the word.

"I played at publishing a paper to keep my mind occupied," Patton was saying. "I shall stay here where the scent of the pine and the juniper and all outdoors satisfies the craving. When the rabble has departed, I will go back

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and print what I please, with no angry subscriber to say me nay. But there will be no more enticing news to draw crowds. It was just a whim of mine, an idle boast, a demonstration of what could be done."

"An' you aim to stay here permanent?" Mack questioned.

"More or less. Keep the five hundred, but bring me up some grub once a month as long as it lasts. And how can I leave, anyway, with no directory in the old shop to guide my footsteps?" Amos Patton finished with an engaging smile.

"I got the tax deeds to most all the old town, an' first time I get a chance I'll make it all over to you," Mack announced. "Ain't nothin' will make a feller stick like feelin' his own ground under his feet."

The reply was a word of thanks and a handshake that meant more.

"So long an' good luck, son," old Mack Barnes called back as he drove away, and there was a little lump in his throat.

As he drove back toward his own humble cabin in the waning sunlight, through the gathering dusk and into the night, Mack was thoughtfully silent.

"I'm glad I'll be gettin' home before Idaho comes back," he muttered to himself. "I allow he would think I acted the fool, usin' good money that away. Looks like some of his fool capers that I been remindin' him of, but I ain't begrudgin' none of it."

But when he finally came in sight of his cabin, he saw that a light was burning there. A little uncertainly, he hurred on. When he drove up, the noise of his wheels brought some one to the door. There was no mistaking that short thickset body silhouetted against the light from the room.

"Hello, Mack, is that you just gettin' in?" called a voice.

"It certainly ain't nobody else," Mack growled. "What the Sam Hill you mean, gettin' back so soon an' spoilin' my nice quiet time?"

"Ain't you heard the news? They struck a rich vein around Goldacre, a million-dollar lode, the papers says. I allowed I'd hurry back an' get in on the excitement. I always claimed they was still plenty of gold in them old hills," Idaho explained.

"It's a danged lie, they didn't strike nothin'," Mack snapped. "I heard all about it, an' got the know on it."

"Who started the tale?"

"A feller by the name of John Barleycorn."

"I—I dunno as I ever hear tell of him, but he cut my trip short a week account of tellin' his jokes. You been gettin' lonesome here by yourself?"

"Dunno as I ever had a better time in my life. I like things quiet. I allow you spread yourself up to Denver City."

"Spent a little rise of two hundred dollars, an' had a real nice time," Idaho replied.

"Seems like that's a heap of money to fool away in a couple weeks just havin' fun," Mack replied, winking at a little star that was just rising in the east.

BUYS OUTLAWS' GUNS

IT has been reported that Roscoe C. Jenkins, of Orleans, Indiana, has purchased a collection of guns for five hundred dollars. Every gun is covered with notches that indicated the number of persons it has killed. One revolver contains eighty-six notches and was formerly owned by "Wild Bill" Hickok, the famous Western outlaw, another contains thirty-eight notches and was once the property of a bandit known as "The Bat."

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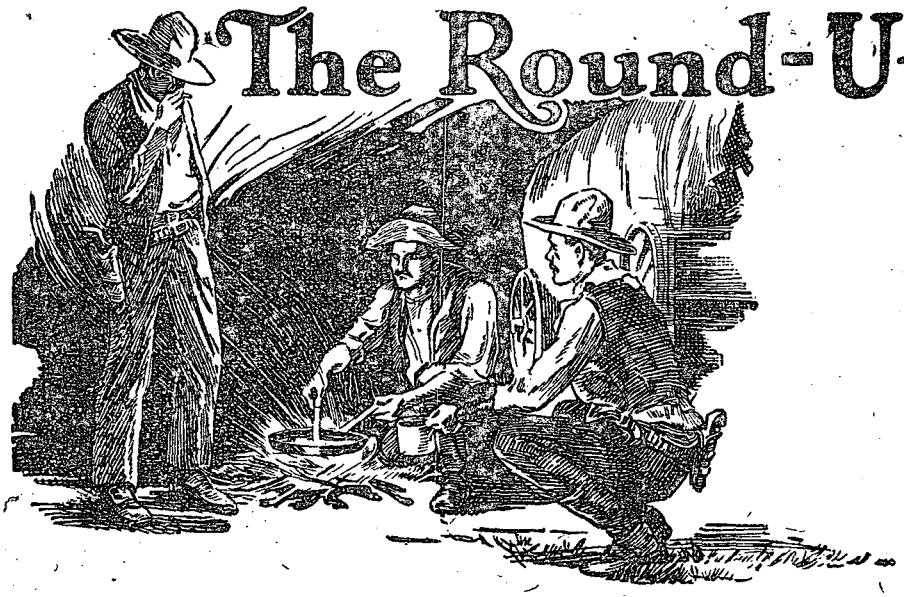
The Round-Up



WELL, Folks, what do you think of Slim? Pretty fine-lookin' lad, eh? And a fine bit of art work, yes?

You'll remember that we told you last week that, commencing with this issue, the covers, for several months to come, are going to depict "A Cowboy's Day," and that Slim is going to be the cowboy.

After the entire series is published, they are going to be bound in attractive form—no printing on them—and offered to you in such manner that you can get a set of these wonderful pictures for *nothing!*

We are sure that this series is going to make a great stir; that you'll be thrilled and delighted with them. Also, we know, from the thousands of requests we receive for reproductions of our covers, that the bound copies of "A Cowboy's Day" will be in great demand.

Until this instance, Street & Smith's WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE has never arranged to make reproductions of the paintings on the covers in the manner described, so that you readers might have them should you so desire.

Each picture in the series will show Slim doing his bit—sometimes alone, sometimes with others—during his cowboy's twenty-four-hour day. Yes, remember that a cowboy is always on duty.

NEXT WEEK!
On the cover of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE
Look for
SLIM!
This picture—Number 1, of
A COWBOY'S DAY
is called
DAWN

Mrs. D. P. Karr, Route 2, Box 453, Tucson, Arizona, once came here, rose up, and said: "Antelopes can be roped from a horse." Since that time, there has been much and mighty talk, pro and con, on the subject. Now again comes Mrs. Karr, and she's got pictures to prove that what she said is so.

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS: Here are the pictures of the waddies and antelope which I promised. I hope they will be clear enough for the doubtful to see. Sorry for the delay in getting them to you.

"Best wishes for WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. It is great all through."

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The Pictures

Good old friend, Bill Meyers, on horse breakin':

"Boss and Folks: Howdy! Just thought I'd drift by this evening, and mebbeso talk a little hoss.

"Everybody, it seems, has took a crack at breaking a few broncs, here at the camp fire, so get on the corral fence while I twist out one or two.

"I'm not going to do this like Miss Mexico breaks her imaginary horses, nor am I going to break any colts. What horses I snap out here to-night will be cow horses, big, strong, five-year-olds fit for range work.

"I'm breaking this bunch like we used to break them back in the old Texas Trail days, when a cowboy knew his groceries or he didn't ride my strings.

"Back in old trail days, a horse was never caught up until he was plumb five years old. That is middle life for a horse, and he is at his best; he is fully developed, his mind is settled, and above all he is not skittish like he was when he was a colt.

"On a ranch where there are women and children, yes, they break colts; but not for general range work. A corral-broke horse is exactly useless to a cow camp. He is entirely too gentle, and by being 'house broke' he lacks the fire and courage of a range-broke horse.

"A house-broke horse is nice for

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women and children; but for the range, where man and horse take their lives in their hands daily, the horse must be courageous and full of fire, ready at all times to take a long chance on his own neck and his rider's life.

"Many times I have had to make my horse jump a cut bank or plunge off into a boiling flood to assist in turning a stampede or straightening out a herd that was milling in the water.

"To the footman a horse is just an animal; but to a seasoned rider a horse is a man with a soul and has a personality all his own. Every cowboy knows that as a horse is broke, just so will he continue through the entire span of his natural life. And for that reason when a cowboy breaks a horse he teaches him to trust him by being kind to him. A firm but gentle hand at the bridle reins, a pair of strong-gripping knees holding to his withers, and a soft voice urging him to his utmost has brought many a horse through places where otherwise he would have floundered thus losing his own and his rider's life as well.

"The whole secret of horse breaking is the use of common sense. To break a horse one must first win the animal's confidence with kindness; I mean, be gentle with him, handle him carefully but firmly, and above all keep your temper, because the horse has one of his own and don't need yours.

"In short: Don't ever treat a horse any worse than you want the horse to treat you."

What, more about roping antelopes? Yes, from Max Coleman, Lubback, Texas:

"Boss of the Round-up: In writing the average story, fiction can be indulged in indiscriminately; but in our arguments at the Round-up which generally concern Western problems, we should be very careful to stick to probable facts. As a native of the West, who spent the best years of his life on a cow pony, and who, during that time attempted to rope every four-footed animal, both wild and tame, he came in contact with, I wish to answer C. C. ("Tex.") Meadows, of Claud, Texas, on the subject of roping antelope.

"As I stated a while back in the Round-up, it is only the very, very exceptional horse from which you can rope an antelope. Once only did I do this, and then only because in riding over a low hill, I surprised a bunch and roped one before they could get lined out good for running.

"I stated then and do it again, that no average cow horse can catch an antelope. Calling the bluff of Mr. Meadows, I wrote a letter to George McEntire of Sterling City, Texas, questioning the statement of Meadows that, 'While laying a pipe line through McEntire's ranch, one of the time keepers was roping antelope from a ten-dollar horse.' Quoting from an answer to my letter dated August 18, 1930, McEntire says: 'If he ever roped one I never found it out.' He also states of his cowboys, who have spent years on the ranch: 'Never have they roped, or claimed to have roped, a full-grown antelope that was sound in mind and members.'

"Following Mr. Meadows's instructions I also wrote the game warden at Rotan, Texas, although I was not aware that any such person made headquarters at this little town. The letter was returned unclaimed. The original letter from McEntire, also the returned letter from the game warden I turn over to the Boss of the Round-up.

"As for Texas Jack, you remember he did not say he ever roped an antelope, but stated: 'Am sure, that if an antelope were turned loose on a forty-foot score, as are calves in a contest, and I had a square chance I could catch the antelope.' In all my experience on the open range, I have never known of an antelope being roped in such a manner."

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Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

A HAPPY New Year, with the best of cheer! The New Year is here once more! One could say many, many things. Instead, we are going to wish you a prosperous New Year—and a New Year filled with hearty good-fellowship. These will lead to the glorious goal—a Happy New Year.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Happy New Year! This is the time of the year when the old prospectors set their faces toward the desert sands and face the new year with renewed hope—the great hope of finding the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow trail. Old-timers of the West have made many a New Year happy for thousands of folks who have been fortunate in staking claims that have yielded more than pay dirt. As far back as the early part of the nineteenth century there was a well-worn trail made by mule skinners who used to handle a jerk line and haul supplies to the roaring mining camps of Ballarat, Skidoo, and Panamint City. It was the gold and silver of the hills in the Argus, Slate, and Panamint Ranges of California that brought into existence Panamint City, the famous Modoc Mine in the Argus hills, and the equally famous mine in the Slate Range.

Between these mining districts and San Pedro, the shipping port and source of supplies, lies a long stretch of desert, and this was the hottest, dirtiest, dustiest, and most alkaline of all the spots on the road. The mule skinners who handled a jerk line over this road along the borders of Searles Lake sure enough cussed these bad lands as vociferously as they did their mules. They cussed these bad lands from one end to the other while hauling gold bullion out of the mines and hauling supplies in. But there came a happy year, folks, when these same bad lands developed into a source of great wealth, and the bad lands around Searles Lake are still producing wealth, while the mines and camps are but memories kept alive by prospectors and assessment workers.

There is no record of who was the first white man to travel through the great salt basin now known as Searles Lake, but it might have been some Spanish conquistador, some Franciscan padre, or some trapper. During the early part of the nineteenth century there was a well-known trail, and in the "roaring '40s" and the '50s the route was well established and used by army scouting parties as well as winter travelers to El Dorado, when the gold seekers were forced to take the southern trail around the lower end of the Sierra Nevadas rather than over the Emigrant Pass. And somewhere around the early '60s two brothers operated a wagon train to the mines. These men later became well-known citizens of Los An-

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geles, and many of their descendants still live there. Two other brothers at about this time were more interested in getting the gold out of the ground than in hauling other miners' gold. They noticed a similarity between the lake or marsh now named for them and Teal Marsh in Nevada, and discovered that the marsh was rich in potash, borax, and other soda salts.

The brother John was daring, courageous, persistent, and a fighter. At Trona the old-timers still tell the story of a bear fight. John encountered the bear while crossing the Tehachapi Mountains on his way to Bakersfield, and finally knifed tthe bear to death, despite the fact that he suffered very great wounds himself. And on another occasion he displayed his courage against the Indians. Some Indians had stolen and driven off most of his stock. With a small posse he pursued and overtook the band of Indians and killed the entire band.

Just a word about this part of the country here now, folks. If you are fond of climbing or hiking, you can climb close to the top of the mountain at Randsburg, whose tip has been turned into a half-mile-wide crater by the operations of the Yellow Aster Mine. Looking down into the vast glory hole from which millions of dollars' worth of gold ore have been removed, you can see, far below, a tiny railway that comes into the bottom of the crater through a tunnel. From there you can go to the Pinnacles. Some old-timers say that these fantastic forms of rock are lime formations which once formed a lake bed. Others take them to be long-extinct mud volcanoes. The boiling mud had been forced up into huge pillars, some being as high as seventy-five feet. These were baked by the intense heat and later corroded by wind and water. One of the most interesting sights along the road is the thick incrustation of soda salts on the old reduction works of one of the borax companies. Were it not on the desert, and the temperature so balmy, one would believe that the formation was composed of ice and snow.

I have climbed to the top of some of these fantastic forms of rock known as the Pinnacles, and which remind me so much of the Garden of the Gods, in Colorado, although not so attractive as the Garden of the Gods. I have taken many snapshots of these weird-looking pinnacles, the famous dry Searles Lake, and other places of historic interest; and with those who care to write to me I shall be pleased to exchange some of the snaps. And by the way, folks, Trona, Randsburg, and Searles Lake are situated on the Mojave Desert, one hundred and eighty miles from Los Angeles.

EDNA OF THE MOJAVE COUNTRY.
Care of The Tree.

Let your Happy New Year wishes be extended to old and to new Pen Pals alike. Begin the New Year with a "badge of friendship."

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to the Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

The open range.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Lots of folks have their own notions about the cow range. Most of the open range here in Oregon is public domain, and the range cattle that feed on it belong, usually, to several different ranchers or outfits, each ranch having its own particular brand. Ownership is determined by the brands, and the cattlemen all work together and to one another's interest, helping to brand each other's calves, et cetera. The cattlemen are organized, and their organization is known as the Stockmen's Association, and they decide on what to do for the best interest of all the ranchers. The cowboys are hired hands who work with the stock, and they do not belong to the association.

Now, just another word, folks. Maybe you would like to know something of the way the stock is cared for. The stock is fed during the winter months and then put on the open range in early spring. And about the first of June the cattlemen start branding the calves. About the first of September the hay is all cut and the home range is ready for grazing. The men round up the beef cattle and finish fattening them on the home range.

Working on the cow range is a wonderful life for those who love the outdoors. Me? Yep, I am an old cowboy who rode in this country forty years ago.

REAL WESTERNER.
Care of The Tree.

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Trail trekkers, this is for you.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We have read a lot about ambitious ex-punchers, would-be cowboys, trail trekkers, and packers. Now we are here, my wife and I, to call their bets. Where are the square-shooters of the roaming clan? We are outfitting ourselves for a pack-and-saddle trip from the State of Washington through all the Western States down toward the land of *mañana*. We'd like to rope us a pard or two who will play the game hard and square and who has learned how to stick. Yes, ladies and gents, you'll have to have an outfit as well as a grubstake, and an ambition to work a spell if the grubstake gets low. And, tenderfoot, this is no trail for you. Let's hear from you, pards, *muy pronto*. MR. AND MRS. FRED S.

Care of The Tree

Washington country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My object in writing to the old Holla is to let you know that I am willing to give information on this part of the country to any one wishing it. And in return for information about Washington State we would like information on Alaska if we can get it.

We are living on an island and have been here three years. There is a place adjoining us with a one-room house where a person could have free rent. I would very much like to have a woman neighbor who would raise rabbits. The island is an ideal place for rabbit raising, and my husband and I have been rather successful with them. We have had rabbits running loose for more than a year. There are no wild animals on the island.

Most women find it too lonesome and refuse to live here, but I am sure there are people somewhere like ourselves who want a quiet home where they can have a garden and a few chickens and rabbits. There is usually enough work here so that folks can get a start, and we can generally spare a few meals ourselves.

I suppose you would like to know about schools here. The school bus runs by our door and goes on the ferry across to Chimicum. I was born and raised in Montana, and my husband in Iowa, and neither one of us would trade a foot of Washington for seven other States. No, we are not boosting, because we have nothing to gain, except a good neighbor. And, of course, every one might not like it here as much as we do. It is better here for fishermen or men who like water and understand boats than it is for any other kind of work. We have our own boat, of course, and do a bit of fishing, too.

MRS. H. C.

Care of The Tree.

Westerners—please say "howdy."

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Well, folks, here comes a long, lanky hombre from the Bay State, who is aiming to ride from Portland, Maine, to California by bicycle next spring. I have trekked through Wyoming and Idaho, and would like to meet up with and say "howdy" to some of the folks when I ride in. So any of you folks who live out Kansas Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, or Nevada way, please write. Would like a few snaps, and also to hear from you cowpokes out that way. I am a lover of horses and the great outdoors, so come along with your letters, *muy pronto*.

CHESTER R. DUCY.

512 North Seventh Street Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Trapper's daughter.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My home is pretty far North, in a wild and unsettled bush-country. Sometimes, in the winter, it is a month between callers, and the most of these are Indians. And I can count all the girls and women that I've seen during the past year on one hand. I am a trapper's daughter, and I enjoy trapping, hunting, fishing, canoeing, hiking, et cetera. We also have a small fur farm that I have the running of, so that I don't get so very lonesome, except that the winter evenings are long and I like to write and to receive letters.

So please, folks, write and tell me all the news of the outside world, and I'll try to give you-all an interest in this great Northwest country of mine.

VIVIENNE VANCE.

Mayview, Saskatchewan Canada.

"I was born in Anderson, Indiana, but we trekked to Newport, Arkansas, when I was five years old. From there we went to St. Louis, Missouri, and then I took it into my head to trek by myself. I would like to get in touch with other hombres who have been around a bit." This new member is Russell Ayers, 412 Plum Street, Cincinnati, Ohio, and he is only sixteen years old.

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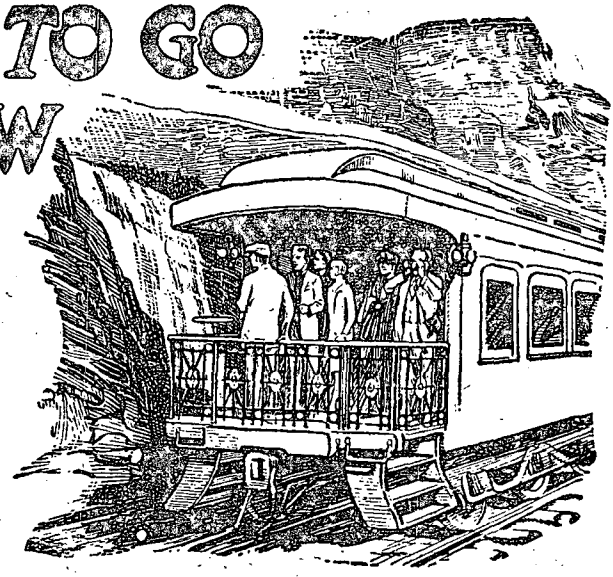
WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE



By John North

We aim in this department to give practical help to readers. The service offered includes accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any feature of Western life. We will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to us, for we are always glad to assist you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

FUR farming is one of the most popular of topics with our readers these days. Now do we wonder, for from pioneer times to the present, dealing in pelts has always been a typically Western industry. Jim F., of Montreal, Canada, is asking some leading questions about this subject, and as the answers are given by an authority in the field we recommend the following discussion to prospective fur ranchers.

"Since I was a small boy, I've been keen about animals of all sorts, Mr. North, and recently I've made up my mind to go in for fur farming," writes this hombre. "At present I'm doing general farming and plan to start my new industry by keeping a few pairs of silver foxes on the side. Can you tell me just how extensive the fur-farming industry is in Canada?

"I've been told that there is a National Silver Fox Breeders' Association. Is this true? If so, how does it cooperate with the individual fur farmer? Does a representative of the association inspect foxes all over Canada? Can one buy breeders from established fur farmers, and what do such animals cost? One other question: Can you tell me what one feeds silver foxes? Needless to say, I'll be mighty grateful for any and all information which you can give me."

Not feeling qualified to speak with authority on this topic, we have asked H. F. D., of Vancouver Island, an enthusiastic and successful fur farmer, to answer Jim's queries. The following letter is full of both interest and information, and we are glad to pass on such accurate firsthand facts.

"The raising of pure-bred silver foxes in pens originated in Prince Edward Island, Canada," writes H. F. D., "and gradually extended across the continent as far as Vancouver Island in British Columbia. After a number of years of successful breeding the ranchers formed the Canadian National Silver

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Fox Breeders' Association and asked the government to form a branch for silver foxes under the department of agriculture. This association has about 6,000 members in Canada, ranching registered and pedigreed silver foxes. This registration and recording of pedigrees is believed to be the most strict and complete system of live stock recording in the world.

"All silver foxes recorded under this system have their pedigrees filed in the Canadian National Live Stock Records office. In January of each year every silver fox rancher must send to the record office the identification numbers of his foxes and the number of the pens in which they are kept. In June he must make a report of the pups born on his farm, their sex, and the numbers of their parents, and also send a small inspection fee for each pup.

"Highly trained inspectors are sent out each year to inspect all foxes on registered ranches for which application has been made. The inspector is the arbiter of the fate of the foxes, for he must decide if a silver fox has attained the standard of excellence laid down by the Canadian National Association. If it passes inspection, it is tattooed for registration. Identification letters allotted to the rancher are tattooed in one ear, and the number corresponding to a name, with the year born, in the other ear.

"If a silver fox does not pass inspection, it may be suspended for a year to try and bring it up to the standard; but if it should fail to pass on second inspection, it must be killed.

"The inspector's report is sent to the record office, and from here pedigrees are forwarded to the rancher to cover each pup which has passed inspection. When a silver fox is sold, it must be transferred to the purchaser on the books of the record office, and only registered silver foxes may be kept on the ranch. This is a safeguard against cross breeding with Alaskans, crosses and reds.

"Canada has almost fifty per cent of the world's supply of ranched silver foxes, and fur farmers of experience send to Canada for high-grade silver foxes to improve their own stock, as they know the Canadian government has a reputation to sustain and has therefore set a high standard.

"Registered silver foxes can be purchased at various prices, and the difference in price may often be wondered at. This may be explained, however, in the one word 'quality.' Foxes may pass inspection and be up to the standard, but naturally some will be better than others. The better the quality, the higher the price. Prize winners and their progeny command a higher price as breeding stock. A silver fox, to be in the prize-winning class, must be outstanding and usually produces pups of the same high standard, provided they have been intelligently fed and cared for.

"As in the case of all other farm produce, the fur crop has its ups and downs. In spite of fluctuations, however, silver fox is, in my opinion, the greatest money-making live stock of the farm to-day for those who are willing

SPECIAL NOTICE

Arizona

with its high mountains and deep canyons, its petrified forests and painted deserts, its fertile valleys and ideal climate, is one of the most alluring of Western States. Many hombres trek out there for a visit and stay for a lifetime. I. B., of Flagstaff, who has lived in every town in the State, is volunteering information to all readers. Address him in care of John North.

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to put their best efforts into making it a success. No farmer should be without a few pairs of silver foxes as an adjunct to his other farm activities. They require little space and time, and practically all their food is raised on the farm.

"Good food is the prime necessity, but even so about five cents a day will feed a fox. They cannot be fed, however on bran mash or potato peelings, nor can their owner take a holiday for a week or two without making provision for having them fed and watered. They must have good fresh meat, cereals, vegetables, milk, and eggs."

If any of you want to ask H. F. D. other questions, we'll be glad to forward your letters to him. Altogether we'd say that the raising of silver foxes sounds like a mighty good proposition to the farmer. And a chance to make good is what we are all looking for, whether it be in fur farming or homesteading. The latter topic is the one about which Tom D., of Tulsa, Oklahoma, wants some advice.

"Can you give me any information about the coastal region of Alaska, Mr. North? Is any industrial development taking place there at the present time? If so, along what lines? What about homestead land? Where is the United States land office located up there? Would the sale of vegetables and berries bring in an income while a chap was proving up on a homestead? What about dairying and stock raising? And last, but not least, where can I get information about Alaska? Could you give me the name of a man up there who would answer a letter?"

The coastal region of Alaska is booming at the present time, with much industrial development going on. A number of mining prospects are being developed, and big interests are getting ready to develop an 80,000 horse-power project near Ketchikan and another 81,000 horse-power project near Juneau. Both of these projects are to be used for operating pulp and paper mills. Tom may be interested to know that there are wonderful water-power possibilities along the southeast Alaskan coast. The whole country is covered with timber—spruce, hemlock, and red cedar mostly.

With added industrial development will come a larger, permanent population. More people will mean an increased demand for foodstuffs. This, in turn, will help the farmer. Tom will find much desirable homestead land to be had, and the sale of vegetables and berries will prove profitable during the proving-up period.

Dairying and stock raising are carried on all along the coastal region. In any farming community a creamery would be welcome. Butter, cheese, and ice cream are made in all parts of the coastal region and in some places in the interior.

For accurate information I would suggest that Tom make inquiries of the chambers of commerce of the larger towns. They will gladly send him facts about their particular communities. The United States land office is located at Anchorage. The Alaska Railroad will also give information to prospective settlers.

For first-hand facts we suggest that Tom write to H. L. R., Gustavus, Alaska, in care of this department. We will also gladly forward letters from other interested readers to this hombre.

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MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proven that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

WILKINSON, LESLIE VERNON.—Thirty-three years old. Dark hair and blue eyes. Last heard from in Huntington Park, California, in February, 1929. Intended to go to Arizona. Information appreciated by Emma Lucille, care of this magazine.

WILSON, HENRY.—Forty-four years old. Five feet four inches tall. A plumber, formerly of New York City. Left San Angelo, Texas, in September, 1930. I still love you, and we can be happy if you will come to my new home. Please write to your lonely wife, Jo, care of this magazine.

LYNCH, WILLIAM S.—My father. Was about nineteen years old when he left Ireland and came to America. Lived in New York for some time and wrote to his people for about two years. Would like to hear from any of his relatives. Address Noward, care of this magazine.

DELB.—Does your promise still hold good? I am at Homestead with Leon, still unable to work. I still love you. Please write to Curly, care of this magazine.

GOLDSMITH, M. E.—Last heard from in Willow Springs, Missouri. Please write to Mrs. Althea Kautzer, Goodrich, Wisconsin.

MERCER, FREDERIC W. L.—Sixty-eight years old. Last heard from in Lakeland, Florida. All here are gone except Herman and I. Please write to your sister, Anna M. Brown, 7603 South Yakima Street, Tacoma, Washington.

WEIPPERT, LOUIS.—Was a nurse at a children's hospital on Randalls Island, New York. Left there in 1929 for Arizona. Last heard from in California. Remember your friend from St. Louis, who went to Pennsylvania? I went to Seattle, Washington, later, but am back in Pennsylvania now. Wrote, but my letters were not answered. Please write to R. L., care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from members of the Fifty-first Pioneer Infantry, from March 6, 1918, to July 7, 1919. Please write to Harry Schutz, Box 371, Pulaksi Street, South Plainfield, New Jersey.

HICKS, CHARLES LEMUEL.—Missing several years. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. May Bixby, Fairland, Oklahoma.

WHIRLE, ELLA MAY.—Please write to Joe Agear, care of Harry Wilder, Yuba City, California.

STORNES, CORPORAL G. C.—Formerly of the Tenth Signal Tower, Panama Canal Zone. Please write to Marie Agear, care of Harry Wilder, Yuba City, California.

FERRIS, ED.—Had a photographic shop, at either 57 or 27 Harry Street, Conshohocken, Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by Mary Fuqua, Box 103, care of J. L. Compton, Fairfield, California.

NEWTON, WILLIAM.—Thirty-six years old. Six feet tall, dark hair, and brown eyes. Last heard from in Hillside, Colorado, in April, 1930. Information appreciated by M. E., care of this magazine.

CHLUPSA, WILLIAM and EDWARD.—Forty and forty-four years old, respectively. Last heard from in a Catholic institute on the North Side of Chicago, Illinois. Were taken there by their mother after father's death. Have not been heard from for about thirty-five years. Information appreciated by their half sister, Mrs. Anna Frank, 3030 South Karlov Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

KINZER, PETE or FRANK.—Left Evanston, Illinois, about twelve years ago. Please write to your niece, Adeline Smith, 1823 Orrington Avenue, Evanston, Illinois.

LUCE, VINCENT.—Please write to sister Pauline, care of this magazine.

DAVIS, ELBERT and MARIE.—Bobby is well. The folks are all in Illinois. Please write to sister, Emily Holtgrave, Box 43, Compton, California.

PALMER, MARY and LILLIAN.—Last heard from in Cleveland, Ohio. Information appreciated by their sister, Marguerite Kavanaugh, Box 47, Copemish, Michigan.

WRIGHT, CHARLES GRANT.—Formerly of Akron, Ohio. Enlisted in the army at the beginning of the Spanish-American War, from Ohio. At that time was the holder of two homestead claims in South Dakota. Information appreciated by Daisy Silvermead, Alliance, Ohio.

COLE, FRANK R.—Sixty years old. Six feet tall, brown hair, and blue eyes. Left Toronto, Ohio, about thirty years ago. Last heard from in Boulder, Colorado. Information appreciated by his son, F. W. C., care of this magazine.

STRONG, WALTER.—Last heard from in New York City. At one time owned The Portrait Shop, in Elyria, Ohio. Please write to your old partner, N. M. Stewart, 423 Bank of Italy Building, San Diego, California.

ZEPEE, ELIZABETH.—Last heard from in Homestead, Pennsylvania, in 1909. Information appreciated by her brother, Andy Balcalk, Albion, Michigan.

POOR, MARGARET.—Do you remember Lady Smith, who roomed with you at Mrs. McKnight's boarding house, in Nashville, Tennessee? Please write to Mrs. Harry H. Russel, Box 1936, Nogales, Arizona.

McCARTHY, MARY ELLEN.—Born February 28, 1879. Daughter of Dennis Eugene McCarthy and Margaret McCarthy. Lived in Joplin, Missouri. Father is dead. Have recently learned you wrote me. I never received the letter. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

TAYLOR, HARRY L.—I love you and always will. Am lonely. Please write to R. B. T., care of this magazine.

MADREE, MAE.—Last heard from in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1918. Believed to have moved to Springfield, Missouri. Information appreciated by R. E. S., care of this magazine.

LYTLE, LYTTLE, or LITTLE, WILLIAM.—Fifty-eight years old. Short, has blue eyes and light complexion. Last seen in 1898, in Topeka, Kansas. Information appreciated by his daughter, E. M. L., care of this magazine.

BLODGETT, MRS. HILDA ARNETT.—Has not been heard from for twelve years. Please write to your old schoolmate of Little Iowa, Leota McCorkle Stagg, Meeteese, Wyoming.

FORDUM, DOLLIE.—Walter and Ella are dead. Last heard from in Canada with her brother, Will. Please write to your niece, Leota McCorkle Stagg, Meeteese, Wyoming.

HOGAN, RUSSIE MAE.—Went to Atheneum School, at East Lake, Alabama. Please write to Blanche Sanders, Box 172, Bellflower, California.

TALLIE, ANNIE.—Please write to Blanche Sanders, Box 172, Bellflower, California.

H. C. D.—Am at the same place. Doing the best I can, but it is hard without you. Promise things will be different if you give me another chance. Please write to H. M. D., care of this magazine.

RHODES, CECIL A.—Last heard from four years ago, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Was in the coast guard, at Point Gibel, Texas, in 1923. A sailor on the Great Lakes, in 1924. Believed to have sailed to Europe in 1926. Information appreciated by Floyd J. Rhodes, Huntsville, Texas.

NOTICE.—On Thursday, July 24, 1930, four girls took me from Caddo, Oklahoma, to Denison, Oklahoma. I was on my way to Dallas, Texas. Would like to hear from them. Address Richard Parmele, 6504 Linwood Avenue, Suite 17, Cleveland, Ohio.

CLOUD, LUTHER T. or JACK.—Tall, blue eyes, and dark hair. An engineer. Was in Aja, Arizona, in the spring of 1927. Information appreciated by Helena O. Cloud, Waterville, Ohio.

GRIDDLY and EASON.—Would like to hear from descendants or friends of Theodore Griddly, who died some time after the Civil War. Also from relatives or friends of Theodore G. Eason, who served as a drummer in Company I, First Iowa Infantry, and later in Company M, First Arkansas Cavalry, in the Civil War. Address Mrs. W. E. Shelafoo, 514 Third Street, Bemidji, Minnesota.

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MOON, GEORGE ERNEST.—Of 113-33 Two Hundred and Fifth Street, Hollis, Long Island, New York. Missing since February 15, 1929. Thirty years old. Weighed about one hundred and forty pounds, five feet five inches tall, fair hair, and blue eyes. Has a lighthouse tattooed on one arm and a heart on the other. Believed to be in Chicago, Illinois. Information appreciated by Mrs. G. E. Moon, Jr., 113-33 Two Hundred and Fifth Street, Hollis, Long Island, New York.

LEMMONS, SAMUEL B.—About seventy-two years old. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Clara Miles, 815 Fifth Street, Alexandria, Louisiana.

LAREE.—At Guntersville. You wrote September 8, 1930, saying you were ill and asking if I would come, should you need me. Why haven't you answered my letters? Has Dago got them? I still love you and the kiddies, and am worried. Please write to A. B., care of this magazine.

McNAUGHT, MRS. INEZ.—Last heard from in Fresno, California. Have important information for her. Please write to Mrs. Hazel Walker, Minden, Louisiana.

CUSHMAN, or CANNON, IDA.—Last heard from in Underwood, Iowa. Information appreciated by her niece, Maudie Jenkins, 1000 East Tenth Street, Shawnee, Oklahoma.

GULLY, ESTON.—Thirty-three years old. Blond and has blue eyes. Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, about eleven years ago. For old times' sake please write to Frankie, care of this magazine.

DUNN, THOMAS DEABER.—Dot needs you. Please write to your brother, Georgie, care of this magazine.

WHITAKER, THOMAS C.—Twenty-five years old. Five feet nine inches tall, weighed about one hundred and eighty pounds, had light-brown hair and blue-gray eyes. A small scar above one eye. Last heard from in Butte, Montana, in August, 1930. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Viola Whitaker, Clarksdale, Arizona.

SCOTT, LIZZIE MAY.—Please write to your sister, Mrs. Alice Scott Hawkins, Route 2, Jackson, Michigan.

GRUMAN.—John Gruman is sixty-one years old. He was brought from Bavaria to America by his father, and was left in an orphans' home in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, when he was four years old. Believes he has a brother in this country. Information concerning his relatives appreciated by Mrs. Paul E. Gruman, 113 Winthrop Street, New Britain, Connecticut.

LAWLESS, J. D.—Last heard from in 1926. At that time he was living on Alfred Street, in Detroit, Michigan. May have gone to California. Information appreciated by his brother, Doctor V. J. Lawless, 85 Talbot Street, Dublin, C. 10, Ireland.

WHITNEY, JAMES AYLWARD.—Formerly of the Royal Air Force, in Canada. Would like to make amends for my part of the misunderstanding. Information appreciated by Wife, care of this magazine.

TEMPLE, LEWIS.—Last heard from in Colorado. Please write to James A. Hoover, Box 183, Gillett, Arkansas.

WOOLCUTT, VICTOR W.—Fifty years old. Last heard from at Montpelier, Idaho. Believed to have gone to New Orleans. Have been ill, and want to hear from my brother. Information appreciated by Cora Woolcutt Lathrop Collins, S. E. 1924, Twentieth and Como Avenues, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

NIENABER.—We miss you so much. Please write to R. N., care of this magazine.

ELLIS, GEORGE.—Of California. I have just returned from Canada, and received your letters from Waco, Texas. Wrote, but my letter was returned. Please write to Irean King, care of this magazine.

SAMPSON, MRS. VINA MAY.—Five feet four inches tall, blue eyes, blond hair, and weighed about one hundred and sixty pounds. Last heard from in Clinton, Oklahoma, in September, 1930. I forgive you. Please write to Ben Sampson, Cordell, Oklahoma.

HESTER, CHARLIE HOYT.—Was discharged from the navy, at San Pedro, California, in 1928. Has not been heard from since. Information appreciated by Mrs. Alonzo Kennedy, Star Route, Vernon, Alabama.

HANK.—Everything as usual. All well. Please write to V. R., care of this magazine.

CAPPS, MYRA.—Mother's name was Dilly. Formerly of Colorado Springs, Colorado. Last heard from in Venice, California. Had a brother living in Coone, Colorado. Please write to your old friend Cleo, Mrs. E. U. Canoose, Jr., 219 Beatty Street, Medford, Oregon.

O'LEARY, JOHN and JOSEPHINE.—Formerly of Chicago, Illinois. Josephine was last heard from in Indianapolis, Indiana. Have valuable information concerning their brother, Joe O'Leary, of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Information appreciated by Jo Roberts, care of this magazine.

GLEASON, F. H.—Last heard from in Waco, Missouri, in 1918. Information appreciated by his son, F. E. Gleason, 819 North Washington Avenue, El Dorado, Kansas.

BLAISDELL, FRANK A.—Have important news. Please write to Grover's old girl, care of this magazine.

CYRUS MAC.—Do you remember May 2nd and 3rd, in Yuma, Arizona? Have good news for you. Please write to A. H., care of this magazine.

CRATTS, OTIS.—Information appreciated by his cousin, Erline, care of this magazine.

ALFRED.—Money in bank for you. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

JOHNSON, MRS. W. F.—Last known address was, in February, 1930, 7635 Rogers Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Moved, leaving no address. We have an important message for you. Please write to X., care of this magazine.

SHERIDON, DOCTOR JACK.—Thirty-eight years old. five feet six inches tall, weighs about one hundred and eighty-six pounds, gray eyes, dark hair, and fair complexion. When last heard from, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was driving a green Chevrolet car. Information appreciated by Romania S., care of this magazine.

HALLMAN, ALBERT.—Last heard from in Effie, Minnesota. Information appreciated by his father, August Hallman, Route 5, Muskegon, Michigan.

HUGHS, MRS. HOMER, nee PEARL ELLA LANGFORD.—Last heard from in Clarksburg, West Virginia. Thirty-six years old. Five feet six inches tall, auburn hair and brown eyes. Has not been heard from for nineteen years. Information appreciated by her sister, Gracie, care of this magazine.

HOOVER, JACK H.—Please write to George Majewski, 2216 West Eighteenth Place, Chicago, Illinois.

CAPURSO, VIRGINIA.—Has not been heard from for five years. Please write to Ma, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any of my buddies who were in the Fifth Regiment, at the Aviation School, Great Lakes, Illinois, in 1920. Please write to James F. Lavey, National Hospital, Ward 1, National Soldiers' Home, Maine.

BRUNK, LEONA; REED, ADA; FRITZ, HELEN; and WACHTER, ROSE.—Also any of my friends in Chicago, Illinois. Please write to James F. Lavey, National Hospital, Ward 1, National Soldiers' Home, Maine.

DUNN, MAHLON.—Twenty-two years old. Five feet six inches tall, sandy hair, blue eyes, and weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. Last heard from at the Midway Hotel, Borger, Texas, in March, 1929. Please write at once to your mother, Mrs. M. L. Dunn, Route 1, Box 75, Myrtle, Minnesota.

PARKER, ALBERT.—Has a brother who lives in Wasco, Oregon. Albert was adopted from the Seattle Children's Home, in Seattle, Washington, some time between 1915 and 1918. He lived in Holdenville, Oklahoma, in 1925. Has dark hair and eyes, and is about eighteen years old. Information appreciated by Henry M. Richelderfer, Box 306, Wasco, Oregon.

The consular office of a foreign government, situated in New York, is trying to locate the following people, for various reasons: BAILEY, ALFRED.—Native of West Indies; last address was, in 1929, 2331 Third Avenue, New York City. **BERESFORD, JACK.**—Native of England; joined the Canadian army in 1914; probably employed as a seaman; last address was 15 East Forty-first Street, New York City. **PRIMAKOW, I. M.**—Last address was Windereme Hotel, New York City. **BARRON, BERNARD.**—Native of Liverpool, England; last address, 25 South Street, New York City. **COULSON, GEORGE WILLIAM.**—Of England; heard from in New Jersey and in New York City. **PARKIN, CHARLES S.**—Recently of 415 South Sixth Street, Camden, New Jersey; believed to be employed by dredging company. **BELL, SAMUEL E.**—Recently of British Guiana; now in New York City. **COLLINS, HENRY.**—Recently of 116 West One Hundred and Twentieth Street, New York City. **HEATON, ALFRED.**—Thirty-eight years old, five feet nine inches tall, dark hair, dark-gray eyes; last heard of in West Lynn, Massachusetts. **BLAKEY, GEORGE.**—Left Hull, Yorkshire, England, for the United States, some fifty years ago. **DUNNE, LAWRENCE.**—Native of England; in January, 1930, was staying at 25 South Street, New York City. **SKUSE, JESS, or ALEXANDER, STANLEY.**—British; believed to be in Utica, New York. **SHAW, MRS. EDWARD J., nee ANNIE SEDDON.**—Left Liverpool, England, in 1922. **O'KEEFE, STEPHEN.**—Native of Liverpool, England; last address was 54 East One Hundred and Eighth Street, New York City. **NAZED, BEDIN, or DIN, or JOHN MORRELIS.**—Formerly of the S. S. "Atlantic City," now in New York City. **McDONALD, MRS. E.**—Left Canada, in 1925; believed to be in Rochester, New York. **Information concerning the present address of any of the above should be sent to Box 2, Station P, New York City.**

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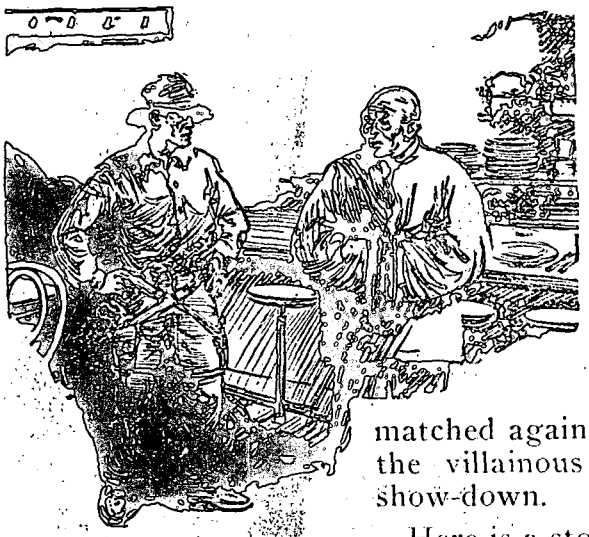

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